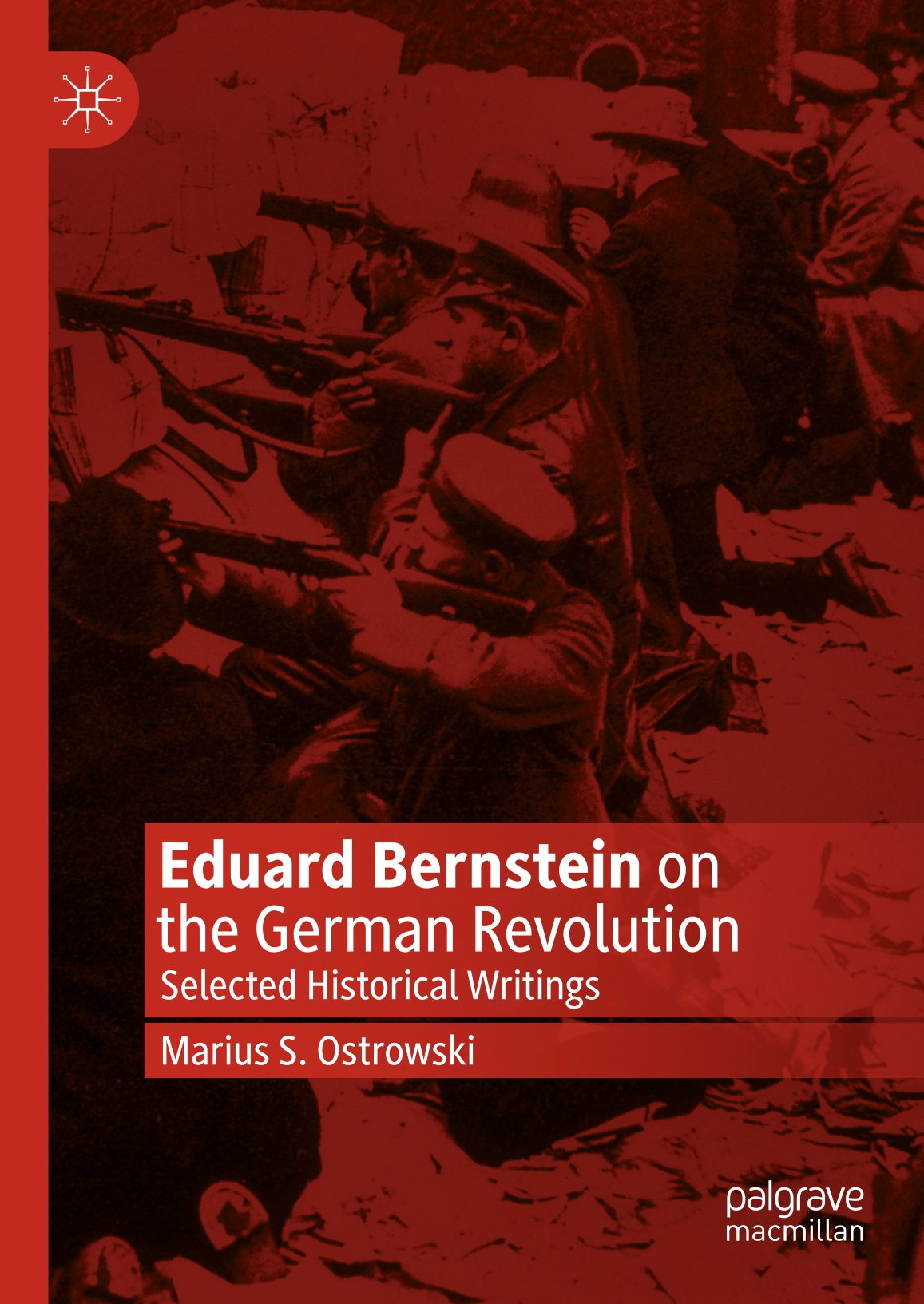

Eduard Bernstein on the German Revolution

Selected Historical Writings

Marius S. Ostrowski

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Marius S. Ostrowski

The 1918–19 German Revolution, which saw the militaristic *Kaiserreich* of Wilhelm II overthrown and replaced by the nascent democracy of the Weimar Republic, has a justifiable claim to be one of the neglected transformative moments of European history. Its effects for Germany were abrupt and radical. What began as a series of strikes and mutinies among the sailors stationed at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven in late October 1918, in response to orders to prepare for a final, suicidal confrontation with Allied naval forces in the North Sea, rapidly metastatised into all-out insurrections in most of the major cities across Germany. By 9 November, as revolutionary workers' and soldiers' councils sprang into existence all over the country, the growing unrest had forced the Kaiser to abdicate, and his Chancellor Max von Baden to transfer power to a transitional government, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* (Council of People's Deputies). This initially took the form of a coalition between the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and its smaller rival, the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), but by the end of 1918 was led solely by the SPD. The shock of this transition unleashed nearly a year of violent upheaval, with aftershocks lasting as late as 1923 in the guise of periodic military revolts and prolonged civil unrest, which saw the political institutions of one of the most advanced societies in Europe quickly and comprehensively transformed. The German Revolution's effects for Europe as a whole were no less profound. Most immediately, it catalysed the end of World War 1 by confirming the military defeat of the German Reich and

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the Central Powers—which had become increasingly inevitable since the failure of the German March 1918 Spring Offensive (the *Kaiserschlacht*), and the subsequent collapse of the German front under the Allies' counterattack during the August 1918 Hundred Days Offensive. More deeply, it precipitated the creation of the conditions for democracy as a form of government to flourish on the European continent for the first time—moving from the minority pursuit of Europe's Atlantic and Nordic fringe to the system under which the majority of its population now lived.

But the clear significance of the Revolution's events at the time has become obscured by the way its legacy has been portrayed in the European political imaginary. Its reception has been overwhelmingly shaped by particular features of its geographical and temporal setting, and by the later trajectory of European political transformation. First, the German Revolution took place against the backdrop of a larger wave of socialist, anti-absolutist, and anti-colonial revolutionary activity that gripped Europe and the wider world between 1916 and 1923: Ireland 1916 and 1919–21, Finland 1918, Hungary 1918–20, Italy 1919–20, Egypt 1919, and Argentina 1919–22, to give only a few examples. Within this wave, the events of 1918–19 in Germany have been largely eclipsed by the successful revolutions against tsarist rule in Russia in 1917 as the perceived paradigm case of interwar political transformation—and it is particularly the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution that is typically centred as the defining political *caesura* of the time. Second, the Revolution represented the culmination of a long period of ideological debate and partisan pressure by various democratic and socialist currents who aspired to a significant break with Germany's absolutist, imperial, militarist past. Of these, it is predominantly adherents of revolutionary strands who have claimed the Revolution's events as part of their 'origin story' or 'founding myth'—albeit marked with tragedy, frustration, and resentment at Germany's failure to successfully implement radical-left social transformations. Lastly, the ultimate collapse of the nascent Republic into Nazi dictatorship, and the brutal end of two decades of uneasy peace with the outbreak of World War 2, has driven assessments of what the Revolution *did* achieve into one of two fairly simplistic directions. Either it is presented as a 'false dawn', an aberrant moment of superficial democratisation that failed to achieve lasting structural transformations in a recalcitrantly reactionary society; or as a 'lost opportunity', a glorious first flowering of progressivism replete with idealistic creativity whose reversal represented one of the greatest tragedies in European history.

These three intersecting factors have contributed to a retrospective context of dismissal and neglect that, for modern readers, instinctively frames any works that cover the Revolution's events from a vantage-point of immediate contemporaneity or recent direct experience. As with other interwar texts, especially from Weimar Germany, it is now impossible to read them without at least a feeling of desolation at how comprehensively their fervent aspirations and earnest visions were thwarted by totalitarian annihilation. However, simply discarding or discounting such works on that basis risks doing them a grave disservice. It holds them to an impossibly high standard of judgment for not having been able to predict what came after. At the same time, it skates over the many subtle ways in which they did detect warning-signs and actively sought to counter them. It also runs the risk of poor historicism, by exaggerating the extent to which WW1 and WW2 actually acted as categorical and irretrievable epistemic and institutional breaks between (in the German context) the *Kaiserreich*, the Weimar Republic, and the *Bundesrepublik* (and to a lesser extent the Democratic Republic).[1] In a similar way, it is not possible to treat the intellectual outputs of this period as merely a form of purgatorial hiatus between Past (pre-twentieth-century) and Present (post-1945). They form part of the European heritage of ideas—sometimes for better, sometimes for worse—and they must be assertively reinserted into the overarching continuity of the canon, insofar as 'canonical' designations are still a desirable signifier in modern scholarship. In other words, it is important for modern historians to know—despite, or rather precisely because of, the Republic's later failure—how those who lived through the German Revolution and its aftermath viewed what they had experienced, not least because their efforts represent, by definition, the first steps in the formation of a historiography of its events.

One of the earliest of such historical perspectives on the Revolution was that of the socialist thinker, journalist, campaigner, and parliamentarian Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932). Best known as the theoretical forefather of modern Social Democracy, Bernstein first achieved acclaim in the 1880s as one of the main defenders of orthodox Marxist thought. His rapid rise to prominence within the socialist movement then turned to notoriety in the late 1890s, when he published several articles, entitled 'Problems of Socialism', and a seminal book, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, in which he outlined a sustained critique of both orthodox Marxist theory and revolutionary socialist practice.[2] After successfully weathering the storm unleashed by his advocacy of revisionism and reformism, Bernstein became

a dominant figure on the right of the SPD, making significant contributions in the years prior to WW1 on the 'national question' in socialist ideology, and the role of the mass strike in social-democratic strategy.[3] In the immediate lead-up to the Revolution, Bernstein's main intellectual preoccupation was with issues of international law, trade, diplomacy, and international relations raised by the increasingly unrestrained and barbaric war conduct that characterised the latter years of WW1. Here, he busily expanded the depth and coverage of nascent social-democratic thought, both making the case for socialists to integrate insights and expertise from legal and constitutional theory into their intellectual arsenal, and taking pains to distinguish his position from the more limited, state-centric thinking of his liberal rivals.[4] When the Revolution broke out and the Republic was formed, Bernstein used his personal close, high-level involvement in the events of late 1918 and early 1919 as a basis to return to another of his intellectual *métiers*: that of the politically-committed historian. Apart from *Preconditions*, and in addition to his prolific journalistic output, Bernstein's most significant works prior to WW1 were historical. They included a study of proto-socialist and democratic tendencies during the English Civil War (1895/1908), translated into English as *Cromwell and Communism*; a three-part history of the Berlin workers' movement (1907–10); and an intellectual history of the nineteenth-century socialist Ferdinand Lassalle (1904), which earned Bernstein the status of *de facto* reviewer of all books on Lassalle for high-brow socialist periodicals such as Carl Grünberg's *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*.[5] Accordingly, between 1919 and 1922, Bernstein applied the same skills to a moment, and a period, whose effects he felt sure would reverberate around Europe for many years afterwards.

Bernstein's account was not the first, nor even the best-known attempt to compile an overview of the events of the German Revolution during the interwar period. Ernst Drahn, a military historian and amateur economist who led the SPD party archive between 1917 and 1920, issued an *Almanac of the German Revolution* in 1919 based on the copious documents from the early stages of the Revolution that he had accumulated for the archive, followed by a *Revolutionary Chronology of the Years 1914–1920*, published in 1920.[6] At much the same time, a frantic race began between the members of different factions in the Revolution to put out commentaries, critiques, and memoirs about the events of 1918–19, which persisted until the cloture imposed by the Nazi takeover. Most notable among these are perhaps the works by various men who were

members of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* between the date of the Kaiser's abdication and 13 February 1919, when a new government was formed on the basis of the elections for the constitutive *Nationalversammlung* (National Assembly) that had been held in January 1919. For the SPD, Gustav Noske and Philipp Scheidemann—the two members of the *Rat* whose actions during WW1 and the Revolution earned them the most opprobrium among the German left—published their accounts of the events in 1920–21.[7] On the USPD side, the first salvo was fired in 1919 by Emil Barth, a left-radical who found himself regularly outvoted even by his fellow party members in the *Rat*, followed in 1926 by the moderate Wilhelm Dittmann.[8] These were complemented by histories and memoirs by other major participants in the Revolution, including Max von Baden (1927) and the leader of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (*Revolutionäre Obleute*) faction Richard Müller (1924–5), as well as figures who subsequently attained prominent positions in the Weimar Republic, such as twice-Reich Chancellor Hermann Müller (1928).[9]

Yet Bernstein was arguably the first to present his account *as* a history of the Revolution—well in advance of the *Illustrated History* (1929) by the Russo-German communist Jakob Reich ('*Genosse* Thomas'), and the best-known of the interwar contributions to the Revolution's historiography, the Marxist historian Arthur Rosenberg's two-volume *History of the German Republic* (1928, 1935).[10] Bernstein was acutely aware of the dearth of a self-confessed historical treatment of the Revolution:

> The German Revolution does not yet have a detailed historical presentation to speak of that covers its course so far. The literature about it up to now consists of summary descriptions of its emergence and initial development, writings about certain events, or the effect of certain people on its course, critical tracts about the policy of its parties, writings about legal cases, official and unofficial reports and proclamations of various kinds, and other government and party records. Many of these are kept remarkably objective, others are characterised by tendentious partisanship, which does not shy away from crudely falsifying facts; some reports […] offer up highly valuable material, but even this has only partly been systematically processed—in short, there is a respectable number of publications on the history of the Revolution available, but as yet no more comprehensive historical work about it.[11]

He also realised the social need for and strategic advantage to be gained from a 'definitive' account of what, by the early 1920s, had become fiercely contested events:

> It concerns the presentation of a period in which the German Republic emerges and seeks to determine its content, but in doing so is afflicted with struggles that have the most fateful effect on the form it has ultimately assumed, and for its entire domestic and foreign policy. However, in our fast-moving time, an entire wreath of legends has woven itself around these struggles, so that not only the behaviour of the parties and persons who participated in them is judged quite wrongly in various ways, but its nature and significance are gauged completely wrongly as well.[12]

In view of this, Bernstein set out to explore the social and intellectual context and significance of the German Revolution from the perspective of a sympathiser of the Weimar regime, albeit one with a fair measure of judicious criticisms of how Social Democracy as a movement had handled the transition from *Kaiserreich* to Republic.

This collection aims to restore Bernstein's account of the German Revolution to the 'castlist' of histories of Weimar Germany. It collects in one place a range of pieces in which he addressed the course of events between the collapse of the *Kaiserreich* in October–November 1918 and the establishment and consolidation of the Republic over the course of 1919 and 1920, and the questions and concerns it raised for the future of German society. It also intends to return focus onto the historical aspect of Bernstein's work as an important, and often undervalued, component of his wider intellectual outlook. One of the most noticeable aspects of the writings collected in the previous volume in this series was the tripartite structure of Bernstein's thought: the diagnosis of societal problems, the critical consideration of existing policy proposals, and the positive formulation of theoretical and practical alternatives.[13] In the works presented in this volume—just as in his studies of Lassalle or the English Civil War—Bernstein extends the focus of these three strands of thought from the immediacy of contemporary society to reflections on the shadows of the past. But this is not as hermetic a divide as it might appear at first sight: when he is talking about the present, he always has at least half an eye on the past, and vice versa. As a result, it is both unwise and impossible to try to separate Bernstein the historian from Bernstein the political (and for that matter, philosophical, legal, or economic) theorist. For Bernstein, citation of apposite historical precedent is often preferable to lengthy argumentation in delivering political insight—and, seen purely from the perspective of an inquisitive social researcher, the Revolution had brought him (and future historians) untold wealth in new material to digest and

incorporate into political thinking. The aim in what follows here is to give some context for Bernstein's account of the German Revolution, outline the main features of his historiographical approach, and offer some comments on how his analysis should be received today.

From Kaiserreich to Republic: Socialism's Move from Protest to Power

Perhaps more than with many other equally seismic transformative moments, the fate of the German Revolution was extensively determined by the wider geographical and temporal context in which it took place. Unlike the European revolutions of 1848–49, and unlike many prominent revolutions and uprisings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the events of 1918–19 took place in the shadow of a long and highly destructive war—namely as part of its aftermath, not merely as one of its protracted, indirect consequences. Europe at the close of WW1 was a broken and devastated continent. It had suffered vast annihilation of its labour, capital, and infrastructure, and even the victorious Allied countries had ended the war in dire economic straits, above all heavily indebted to the rising financial sector in the USA. European countries also entered the interwar period having undergone vast economic alterations. The pressures of supporting four years of all-out conflict had prompted massive changes in the purposes of economic enterprise, as well as increases in the size and interventionist role of state institutions, which amounted to a thorough nationalisation and militarisation of the economy. These changes were echoed in wider society. Europe during the 1917–23 revolutionary wave was awash with competing nationalist and revanchist claims and movements, with new political identities in Eastern Europe especially seeking to capitalise on the dissolution of the continent's three remaining great feudal empires. The military alliances that had confronted one another on the battlefield threatened to entrench into permanent divisions between rival political-economic blocs—French-led *Entente* versus German-led *Mitteleuropa*—especially once the territorial losses and other punitive provisions of the final peace treaties were put into effect. Domestically, the ideological and institutional volatility these factors created was exacerbated by the long crescendo of activist efforts to empower women and the working class, culminating in significant expansions of the electoral franchise in both established and nascent democratic polities.

In addition, European societies were faced with a glut of unused weaponry and other materiel, as well as the logistical and demographic challenge of demobilising vast numbers of military personnel and reabsorbing them into civilian life.

The confluence of these international factors meant that the revolutionary forces in Germany were operating in circumstances that not only were not of their own making, but also imposed serious constraints on how far and how fast they could achieve their social and political goals. While, of course, the shock of military defeat often acts as a catalyst for societal transformation—the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions immediately come to mind—the conditions of Germany's loss in 1918–19 were so unique that, as many of the Revolution's leaders observed, it was impossible to compare its trajectory with what might have happened in more normal, favourable times. In reality, the rupture the Revolution brought about—and the tenor of its early aims and achievements—was as much a pressure-valve response to the long years of stifling autocracy under the *Kaiserreich* as the peculiar wartime exigencies of repression, censorship, rationing, labour requisitioning, and wage restraint. Yet the attempts to offer redress in the Revolution were seriously impaired by Germany's post-war political and economic state—the result of what was done to it by the victors, and also (crucially) what was left undone. The interwar Republic that emerged was a hybrid of old and new elements, characterised by several stark internal contradictions. It was a country that had been defeated in war, albeit only 'partly'—with its total collapse on the Western Front balanced, if not outweighed, by its total victory in the East in many Germans' minds. It was forced to accept peace conditions whose draconian terms were a response to the high-handed hubris of the Kaiser's regime, but which ultimately cast a cloud of suspicion over the social democrats who had long resisted and eventually supplanted him. This regime itself had been beaten but not destroyed. The Kaiser was in exile, not dead. Junkers and bourgeois monarchists still controlled the German military and civil service, and had retained their presence in party politics, albeit in reconstituted and rebranded form. Germany had also been formally disarmed, but not truly demilitarised—and the Republic never fully outgrew the violence that marked the Revolution's flashpoints.

Despite these tensions, the Revolution turned Germany very suddenly from a European beacon of chauvinist reaction to one of socialist progress—reflecting its long-held role as the 'chief pole' of socialist and labour activism, and leapfrogging polities with a more gradualist emancipatory

tradition in the process, including Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Yet the arduous road to finally bringing about this turn had come at a heavy cost for the German left. The years of attritional debates and disputes in German Social Democracy—over revisionism versus orthodoxy in Marxist theory, reform versus revolution in practical strategy, and nationalism versus internationalism as the true expression of socialist principles—had cemented a profound factional divide within the movement. Ultimately, it was the SPD leadership's decision to steadfastly join with bourgeois parties in voting to approve war credits to the Reich government during the war—despite its increasingly transparent imperialist and expansionist war aims, and growing domestic and international outcries about its brutal war conduct—that converted this divide into a full party split.[14] What emerged from this split over the course of 1916–17 was the USPD, which brought together a somewhat eclectic and heterogeneous grouping of social-democratic traditionalists, revisionists, 'Marxist centrists', and the revolutionaries of the *Spartakus* League. United almost exclusively by opposition to the war, the harmony between the USPD's rival tendencies did not long survive the arrival of peace and the outbreak of the Revolution. In particular, the existence of an antecedent revolution in Russia—which, despite the best efforts of its domestic counter-revolution and its opponents abroad, was in the process of establishing an apparently successful state built on a substantially different understanding of socialism—posed an acute threat to the party's integrity. While other USPD groupings were sceptical about the relevance of the Russian example for their own German context, preferring to adhere to the old social-democratic strategy of parliamentarism, the revolutionary *Spartakus* wing embraced its leftward pull, and committed itself in October 1918—during the earliest stages of the Revolution—to a programme explicitly inspired by the Bolshevik model of council (soviet) government.[15] The upshot of this was that, whereas during the *Kaiserreich* the proletarian left in Germany had been represented somewhat monolithically by the old 'Majority' SPD, the Germany of the Revolution and early Republic also featured a volatile electoral formation to the left of it, which leeched disproportionately off the older party's support in its traditional heartlands of Thuringia, Northern Saxony, Berlin-Brandenburg, and the Ruhr.

When the Republic was declared on 9 November 1918, Bernstein was one of the figures in German society who was immediately catapulted right into the heart of this unexpected (but long-awaited) *volte-face* in the country's political situation. As a lifelong pacifist, he had broken with his

erstwhile allies on the right of the SPD over the war question, and after he had spoken increasingly vocally against maintaining the *Burgfrieden* ('party truce') with the other bourgeois parties in the SPD's parliamentary party meetings, he had been one of the few revisionists expelled from the party's parliamentary grouping in March 1916. Though he readily joined the Social-Democratic Working Group (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) formed in the Reichstag by the other expellees as a temporary measure, he consistently hoped to rejoin the SPD group once the war was over. When the Working Group's members were expelled from the party entirely in January 1917, Bernstein only reluctantly agreed to support the formation of the USPD at Gotha in April 1917. Once the Revolution started, it was in this capacity as a USPD member that Bernstein was appointed Assistant Secretary to the Reich Treasury by the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. The SPD-USPD coalition soon collapsed as a result of the *Rat*'s response to the skirmishes between revolutionary and regular government troops at Christmas 1918 (the *Weihnachtskämpfe*), with all of the USPD *Rat* members resigning *en masse*. Despite this, Bernstein was one of the few USPD members to stay in post. As a result, he was working in the Treasury at the time that the *Spartakus* uprising broke out in January 1919—generally seen as a direct result of the Christmas incident—and narrowly escaped serious injury amid intense fighting near his office building. Although he agitated intensively for democratic elections to be held as soon as could reasonably be arranged, Bernstein was not himself elected to the *Nationalversammlung*, which meant that he was notably absent from the deliberations that eventually agreed a constitution for the new Republic. When his official term expired shortly after the elections, he thus became free to devote more time to writing, at which point he resumed the frenetic literary and journalistic activity of his wartime years.

Bernstein's main preoccupation in this activity was the question of reunifying the disparate forces on the German progressive left under the aegis of Social Democracy. His basic thesis was that the original reason for the *Parteihader* ('party dispute') was specifically the war question—the approval of war credits, and the toleration for the Reich government's war conduct. With the armistice that *de facto* ended WW1, this reason was now void, which meant that—for Bernstein at least—there was no longer any obstacle in the way of reuniting the SPD, and moving on from the dispute. He recognised that, over the nearly three years since the initial break, other differences in policy and outlook had entered in to exacerbate

the divide, but he insisted that they were all ultimately derivative issues, which could be addressed within the remit of a pluralistic 'big tent' debate of the kind that the SPD had pursued on other questions before—not least the revisionism debate at the turn of the century. Bernstein emphasised the strategic urgency of reuniting the forces of the progressive left in Germany, in order to be seriously able to take on the responsibilities of government now they had fallen into the hands of Social Democracy after the end of the *Kaiserreich*. As a result, he devoted extensive time to propagandising for a basic unity programme designed around salvaging the German economy, consolidating and developing its nascent democracy, and beginning the process of socialising its industries.[16] Bernstein had a clear electoral basis for his concern. The shift from *Kaiserreich* to Republic had led, in his view, to a pronounced shift in the task required of Social Democracy—from protest and opposition to creation and construction.[17] In that context, the SPD needed to be able to speak with one united voice, in order to win as many votes as possible for its programme in the *Nationalversammlung* and subsequently in the Reichstag—and not lose constituencies to bourgeois parties due to internecine left-on-left conflict with the USPD. Bernstein put his focus on 'left unity' into practice himself in a typically idealistic way. He rejoined the SPD on 24 December 1918—a decision loudly fêted by its main party organ *Vorwärts*—without renouncing his membership of the USPD, becoming from then on a demonstrative one-man unity project, so that on a host of official documents in early 1919 he is consistently listed as "SPD and USPD".[18]

Yet in the first instance, his optimistic efforts met with little success—thwarted above all by excessive dogmatism and a widespread flirtation with Bolshevism among the German left. Bernstein became utterly frustrated at the doctrinaire, self-indulgent, and frankly amateurish way in which many USPD members approached the question of entering government alongside the SPD.[19] Again and again, the USPD tried to overplay its hand in its negotiations with the SPD in various forums—the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* itself, as well as the Central Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in which democratic power was formally vested in the initial stages of the Revolution. Eventually, not long before the *Spartakus* uprising in January 1919, he lost patience with the party, and stopped attending its executive meetings entirely.[20] Bernstein's SPD-reunification drive and his evident dissatisfaction with the USPD did not go unnoticed, and at the USPD conference held in Berlin in March 1919, a motion was passed that explicitly banned its members from also being members of

another party. Bernstein took this as a personal slight, and left the party ostentatiously, writing an open letter to its members that was published in both *Vorwärts* and the USPD's organ *Freiheit*.[21] From that point onwards, Bernstein established himself as an implacable enemy of Bolshevik tendencies within the German left, condemning it as nothing more than a contemporary update to the Blanquist glorification of revolutionary violence that Social Democracy had fought so hard to eradicate in the mid-nineteenth century. He shifted his electoral efforts from Breslau to Berlin in 1920 in order to fight for the SPD against the comparatively greater threat from the USPD and the Spartacists, who had by now reconstituted themselves as a separate party, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).[22] For Bernstein as both campaigner and historian, Germany in the wake of 1918–19 had the hallmarks of Russia between the two 1917 revolutions. USPD and KPD were in danger of doing to Germany everything that the Bolsheviks had forced on Russia after October 1917, and it was incumbent on all social democrats to prevent them from doing so. At the same time, Germany at the start of the 1920s had a chance to learn from the Russian case, avoid making the same mistakes, and achieve a lasting transformation of society. Whichever way the country chose would determine whether the promise of the Revolution would be squandered or brought to fruition.

Writing the German Revolution: A Study in Social-Democratic Historiography

In the works that form this collection, Bernstein draws on his direct experience of the German Revolution, as well as his own previous research, to make a sizeable evidential contribution to the history of the socialist movement. In the first text, *Die Deutsche Revolution: Geschichte der Entstehung und Ersten Arbeitsperiode der Deutschen Republik*, here translated as *The German Revolution: A History of the Emergence and First Working Period of the German Republic*, Bernstein gives a highly detailed account of the events of the Revolution and their intellectual, economic, and political context.[23] He starts with the fragmentation of Wilhelm II's government in October 1918 under the effects of its own "blood and iron" policy and the obsession with power and military victories, which had fuelled the egregious failures by Erich Ludendorff and the German High Command, the *Oberste Heeresleitung*, as well as the Kaiser's successive chancellors (Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, Georg Michaelis, Georg von

Hertling, and Max von Baden). Bernstein tracks the landslide of revolutionary spread from the mutinies at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven to Hamburg, Köln, Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden, and the sudden proliferation of workers' and soldiers' councils. He outlines the ideological differences within German Social Democracy, emphasising the left-USPD's embrace of Bolshevism and anti-reformism, and devotes several chapters to the continuous difficulties this created for the creation and proper functioning of a new government after the Republic was proclaimed on 9 November. Bernstein highlights the three major moments that shaped the trajectory of the Revolution: the first Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Germany on 16–21 December; the *Weihnachtskämpfe* and the USPD's departure from the governing coalition on 29 December; and, in by far the longest chapter in the whole work, the *Spartakus* uprising of 5–12 January 1919, with a further chapter dedicated to the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. He closes the account with an overview of Germany's overall situation in the first months of the Republic, and assesses the reasons for the worse-than-hoped-for results of the *Nationalversammlung* elections on 19 January. Throughout the text, originally written as part of a planned (but seemingly never completed) larger work, Bernstein emphasises themes that he first considered much earlier in his career, including the reformist and revolutionary tendencies within socialism, the strategic importance of ideological and organisational party unity, the dangers of militarism and political violence, relations with non-socialist and bourgeois movements, and the defence of parliamentary democracy.

Bernstein presents a historical analogy to the German Revolution in the second main text, *Wie Eine Revolution Zugrunde Ging*, here translated as *How A Revolution Perished*, an account of the 1848 French Revolution as well as an explication of the significant new theoretical and practical questions that its events raised for the German experience.[24] Bernstein takes the view that, despite important differences in terms of economic structure, class divisions, and class organisation, there are instructive parallels between the 1848 French Revolution—memorably analysed by Karl Marx in *The Class Struggles in France 1848–1850* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*—and the German Revolution, above all in terms of the problems that confronted each new republican formation (albeit at different scales). In Bernstein's view, 1848 inaugurated a new type of revolution, differing from the great political revolutions of earlier generations, which could act as a prototype for future

revolutions in advanced countries. He explicitly attributes his 'turn' towards reformist socialism to his study of the 1848 French Revolution, and revisits his arguments in the 'reform or revolution' debate. Bernstein suggests that this apparent choice is not a fight over a new principle, but rather resumes an old contradiction in the conception of 'revolution' in Social Democracy—between violent intervention in the functions of a societal body, and replacing the institutions that impede these functions with new ones that foster their strength. In general, Bernstein argues that both bourgeois-democratic and socialist parties have much to learn from the French experience, not only by learning from the mistakes that were made then but also by taking into account the massive social-economic changes that have taken place in the intervening period—including far-reaching changes in the size and composition of social classes. These changes have refined societies' complexity, making them all the more sensitive to disturbances by policies of brutal wilfulness and violence. Bernstein returns to his critique of Bolshevism, but here castigates it less for its *putschist* tendencies, and more for its misguided attempt to mechanistically apply the 'early' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels of the *Communist Manifesto* to societies that lack the necessary conditions for that form of transformation. He emphasises the need for the fledgling German Republic to maintain a peaceful foreign policy, urgently avoid any return to monarchism, and above all reunify the fragmented strands of Social Democracy, in order to keep in check the latent reactionary, anti-system tendencies of the German bourgeoisie.

Finally, in a selection of articles published in social-democratic periodicals and newspapers during and after the Revolution—chiefly *Vorwärts*, but also *Freiheit* and the main paper in his constituency, the *Breslauer Volkswacht*—Bernstein elaborates on his historical account and theoretical arguments in the two main texts. In the first articles, published between December 1918 and March 1919, Bernstein deals with the fallout from the controversy over his own party affiliation. He spells out his evolving (but consistently enthusiastic) position on social-democratic reunification, and starts to outline a possible unity programme based around rebuilding the German economy and consolidating the new constitutional democracy. After a brief hiatus, during which he worked on other literary projects, including a set of essays on socialist economic theory, Bernstein resumed his journalistic activity between late August 1919 and April 1920, with a focus on extending his critique of Bolshevik and Blanquist tendencies within the left-wing of the USPD and the KPD.[25] The most intense

period of his post-WW1 journalistic output came in the lead-up to the first full Reichstag elections on 6 June 1920, in which he was again running and campaigning heavily for the SPD. Here, his articles focus on the significance of newly democratised elections under the Republic (as compared to their near-façade status under the *Kaiserreich*), and seek to demarcate the SPD as the only true 'party of the Republic', facing both the anti-Republican hostility of the *völkisch*-conservative German National People's Party (DNVP), national-liberal German People's Party (DVP), the KPD, and what remained of the USPD after the KPD's defection, and the weak support for the regime from the Christian-democratic Centre Party (*Zentrum*) and the social-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP). Once elected in Berlin, Bernstein became preoccupied with the debates over the SPD's future ideological direction, taking a central role in drafting the noticeably revisionist 1921 Görlitz Programme, which replaced the more orthodox 1891 Erfurt Programme (to which he had also significantly contributed).[26] His journalism once again dropped off, but his comparatively few articles from 1921–22 are nonetheless of great interest as they show Bernstein's burning concern to trace the progress and (retrospectively) the outcomes of the Revolution.

Despite their wide-ranging subject-matter, what unites these texts is a very particular approach to the historiography of socialism, especially its forays into political revolution. For Bernstein, the aim of political historiography is to delve into the details of concrete past events, and either verify or falsify the claims posited by political economy about the deep-structure social forces at work in human history by uncovering evidence that either corroborates or contradicts what these claims would lead one to expect in each case. In particular, as Bernstein phrases it in his foreword to *The German Revolution*:

> The task of the political historian […] is to ascertain the deeper contradictions that underpin practical struggles, and bring them to view for the sake of evaluating them correctly.[27]

In modern terms, what Bernstein is describing probably fits best the description of historical sociology or historically-oriented social theory—especially of a kind influenced by social conflict theory. In the specific case of the German Revolution and the partisan violence associated with it, these contradictions were ideological, and underlay questions of everyday strategy:

> These struggles were about a contest between two fundamentally different conceptions of socialism and social development, which can be traced through the entire modern socialist movement, but of whose deeper historical significance only the fewest of those participating in these struggles were fully conscious. Rather, they only presented themselves to most of them in the guise of questions of tactical behaviour, or the method that was practical at the time, towards which they then adopted a purely practical stance—in which greater or lesser insight into the contexts and possibilities one can recognise is decisive.[28]

In other words, at a time when the everyday carried momentous import for the future trajectory of society, but only very few people truly grasped the nature of this import, Bernstein saw the function of political historiography as bringing to the fore the competing futures for German society that were at stake.

Crucially, the nature of the contradictions that political historiography must focus on are not simply reducible to the straightforward bourgeois-proletarian class distinction heuristic deployed by orthodox Marxian analysis. What the Revolution made obvious, for Bernstein, was that its ideological contradictions existed *within* the proletariat—to be precise, within the proletariat in its *politically-organised form*. None of Germany's socialist parties had successfully captured the unanimous support of the German working class: SPD, USPD, and KPD were competing with one another for German workers' 'hearts and minds'. In that context, it made no sense for political historians to focus exclusively on distinctions rooted in the economic base—instead, they had to examine contradictions that were forming within the superstructure as well. Bernstein thus applies in political historiography the same methodological commitment to the *quasi-autonomy of the superstructure*—especially the quasi-autonomy of *politics*—that had become an increasing feature of his theoretical work since *Preconditions*, including in his WW1-era writings.[29] He is more committed than ever to 'unfreezing' the superstructure from the economic base, and in his conclusion to *How a Revolution Perished*, he argues that there are clear historical moments—including the moment of the Revolution—in which economics is not overwhelmingly dominant and determinant for social outcomes.[30] In his double-bill history of France 1848 and Germany 1918–19, Bernstein provides a case-study for Marxists in what happens when the superstructure changes, but the base (largely) does not. He sees in both revolutions evidence that the social emancipation of the proletariat

already achieved a significant advance through the expansion of their civic rights and the general franchise, supporting his reformist conviction that progressive political struggle cannot limit its goals to economic socialisation.[31] He also dwells on the cases where newspapers that had formerly been semi-official mouthpieces of the Kaiser's government underwent transformations or reorientations in response to the dawn of the new Republic, depicting them as signal moments where ideological certainties were unmasked and overturned, and previously-hegemonic social groups were forced to confront the anomie engendered by Germany's revolutionary rupture.[32]

Given that this is the aim of historiography, the politically-committed historian requires particular skills and attributes to carry out their tasks. Bernstein describes the role of the historian as a combination of the poet and the naturalist:

> But if history is to be our teacher, then we must inform ourselves about all the facts that influenced the events we are looking at. We must seek to unite the creative power of the poet, who lets men and battles come to life anew, with the conscientious strictness of the naturalist, whose magnifying glass does not leave the tiniest detail unexamined.[33]

Accordingly, he writes his account of the Revolution with both the experimental air of a quantitative social scientist and the narrative quality of a qualitative social theorist. The Revolution acts as a testing-ground for his long-held assumptions about the growing opportunities for—and appropriateness of—reformist over revolutionary socialist strategy, except this time with immediate practical evidence rather than references to a comparatively distant transformative moment, as in *Preconditions*.[34] For Bernstein, a vital historical skill is the ability to make accurate and apposite comparative judgments about discrete events. With an allusion to the Leibnizian insight that "no two constituent parts of the organic world are completely the same as each other", which makes it harder to draw straightforward analogies between them, he observes that historians need to develop the skill of finding the *right* things to compare with one another, and making the *right* comparisons between them.[35] Of course, he argues, it is possible to draw lessons for the present from the past—but in order for those lessons to be relevant and effective, historians must make sure they are looking for them in the right place. In Bernstein's view, the most powerful manifestation of this is that, for decades, socialists have

been paying attention to the wrong French revolution in the nineteenth century. The 1871 Paris Commune, whose brief existence became a point of theoretical fixation for leftists ranging from Mikhail Bakunin to Joseph Stalin—and an inspiration to literary figures from Émile Zola to Bertolt Brecht—was in reality not a good example for anything of genuine interest to early-twentieth-century socialists. It was dominated entirely by military questions from start to finish, and none of the socialist measures it introduced had the opportunity to be really adequately tested. Instead, it is the longer-lasting democratic dawn between 1848 and 1851 that has tangible insights to offer for socialist policy and strategy, and Bernstein reemphasises that it was his historical engagement with the 1848 French Revolution that initially prompted his turn towards reformism and revisionism in the 1890s.[36]

A vital ingredient for making accurate comparisons, for Bernstein, is collecting an adequate quantity and quality of data to inform historical analysis. A noticeable aspect of his account is that he frequently reproduces in full documents that he believes are vital to understanding his interpretation of events—with particular focus on documents that his contemporary and later audiences may not have readily available, or which might have become lost from wider circulation by his time of writing. Alongside citations from memoirs, official statements, and articles from *Vorwärts*, *Freiheit*, *Rote Fahne*, and other newspapers, he thus often refers to the pamphlets and fliers that were circulated by rival factions among workers and soldiers in Berlin—not just because of the major impact they had on people's behaviour in the Revolution, but also because they are overt, propagandistic statements of the ideological contradictions he is trying to assess. Collating a copious number of such documents is, for Bernstein, not just a matter of lending one's analysis the requisite depth and erudition, but may also help reveal ideological meanings and connections that are too obscure in each piece on its own. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, he suggests, is a good example of an author whose articles must be read *en masse* and in conjunction in order for their political meaning to become clear—something that could incidentally, *mutatis mutandis*, also easily be said of Bernstein's own output.[37] In this vein, Bernstein sees the task of the historian as partly being that of a chronicler, creating a repository of material to ensure that future historians and theorists have everything they need at their disposal to make a 'true' judgment of the German Revolution's events. This is certainly in character with his lifelong side-activity as an editor and publisher of major documents in the history of

German Social Democracy: Bernstein brought out more than 20 volumes of records of the early socialist movement (1902–5) and the causes of WW1 (1914–15), several editions of correspondence with and between Marx, Engels, and Lassalle (1905, 1913, 1925), and a 12-volume collection of Lassalle's speeches and writings (1919–20).[38] In another familiar move, Bernstein uses the opportunity of reviewing the historical material he has collected on the 1848 French Revolution to quibble with and correct what he sees as deep-seated historiographical errors among his fellow socialists about it—most prominently what he sees as their unjustified focus on Louis Auguste Blanqui as the "centre of the workers' movement" in France at the time, at the expense of the more subtle and overlooked influence of Louis Blanc.[39]

This conception of the politically-committed historian's task inevitably raises questions about their subjective positionality relative to the events they discuss. Bernstein is refreshingly honest and self-effacing about his inability to be a perfectly neutral commentator about the Revolution.[40] As a prominent member of Social Democracy, and for a time a high-ranking official within the post-Revolution government, he was far too closely personally invested in the success of the Republic to be indifferent to the Revolution's outcome. At the same time, as an anti-militarist *and* a reformist, he had accumulated several years' worth of experience of being in the minority in his particular chosen corner of Social Democracy, giving him an idiosyncratic and fairly equitably critical perspective on the activities of both SPD and USPD mainstreams. In general, Bernstein sees genuine blanket impartiality of interpretation as a difficult goal for historians to strive for.[41] Instead, he differentiates between what could be described as a *diagnostic* form of partiality, defined as meddling with, exaggerating, or concealing facts, and a *critical* form of partiality, conceived as "expressing [one's] individual verdict on events, as suits the writer's political standpoint", and considering "the factor of personal responsibilities". The former variant he sees as dangerous to good history and theory, as it is fundamentally incompatible with the historian's "requirement of truth". The latter, however, he is far more receptive to, as an often necessary requirement of the historian's own "political conscience".

This distinction becomes all the more important for would-be historians who were themselves co-participants in the events they describe. Bernstein accepts that, as a politically-committed "fellow fighter [*Mitkämpfer*]" in the Revolution—specifically, as one with a clear (albeit shifting) party affiliation—he has no plausible way of denying his own

partisanship. Yet he distinguishes between being "unpartisan [*parteilos*]"—which he explicitly concedes he is in no position to be—and being "impartial [*unparteiisch*]" in the diagnostic sense—which he holds up as his defining watchword when writing his account. As he puts it bluntly: "I have made an effort to be fair, but I have laid no value on pleasing everyone". A major reason for this is the "incisive significance" of the events he describes "for the fate of [his] own people and peoples in general"—events that were still very much unfolding around him as he was writing, making it all the more difficult to establish a full sense of their trajectory. In the time between the events of the Revolution and the publication of *The German Revolution*, the Republic had already witnessed two national elections, a host of *Landtag* elections, and four changes of government—as well, most significantly, as the attempted Kapp-Lüttwitz *putsch* in March 1920, which laid bare the vulnerability of the new Republic to opposition from its own anti-system parties, and which was only defeated by a concerted general strike joined not just by all three proletarian parties but by a good number of their bourgeois rivals.[42] These events were all still fresh in Bernstein's mind:

> … still so interested in it with all my feelings and thoughts as though I had also perceived everything that was done wrong in these struggles, […] as if it happened to me as well. Everything I lived through at the time came to mind again as I was writing this book.[43]

With events both so clear to the recollection, and so raw to the emotions, it cannot be expected—and, in the interests of adding some hard truths to socialist scholarship, it is also not to be desired—that a socialist historian could write an account as if they had left him entirely cold.

Bernstein observes that one of his main tasks when writing his account of the Revolution—and, by extension, of political historians more generally—was adjudicating between mutually incompatible existing narratives about its events, or what in more modern terminology would be termed its rival *emplotments*.[44] Again, he carefully distinguishes between castigating accounts—usually of Spartacist and ultraconservative origin—that simply get their facts wrong about the causes and consequences of events, and permitting a fairly wide variety of competing interpretations of these facts. But Bernstein also leaves his readers in no doubt about the 'right' interpretation of the Revolution's events—in short, a view of the Revolution as a moment of both popular *and* class emancipation, which it was incumbent on all self-declared progressives to support. This is especially evident in his

articles, in which he repeatedly exhorts German workers to unite resolutely behind the SPD as the surest "buttress" of the Republic's institutions.[45] In doing so, Bernstein is as much trying to push a social-democratic partisan line about the origins of the Republic as he is concerned to avoid leaving space for myths to emerge about the causes and course of the Revolution. This was no small concern: the deaths of the Spartacist leaders Liebknecht and Luxemburg at the hands of the volunteer divisions hired by the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* to defeat the January uprising, and the perceived lack of serious punishment for their killers, were already turning them into martyrs and icons for the KPD and left-USPD. At the same time, the refusal of the *Oberste Heeresleitung* to accept any responsibility for their catastrophic war conduct had prompted German nationalists to blame the German military defeat in WW1 on the Revolution and the new civilian government of the Republic (now better known as the infamous 'stab in the back' myth).[46] But on a more subtle level, Bernstein also inveighs against the tendency—already evident in the memoirs and commentaries that were starting to emerge about the Revolution—to turn every political conflict into a battle between predesignated 'heroes' and 'villains'.[47] Insofar as histories should be considering the impact of individuals on fundamentally social events at all—rather than, say, social groups, institutions, or structural forces—it is much more valuable to see them as subject to conflicted motivations, uncertainties, human fallibilities, and constraints of circumstance.

Bernstein's criterion for judging the role of individual figures is based around what he perceived as their political skills (or lack thereof). Viewed in those terms, it is difficult to say that any of the German Revolution's protagonists come off outstandingly well in Bernstein's narrative, even the purportedly more 'sensible' governing members of the SPD. Noske's proximity to the military is portrayed as a considerable asset in the early stages of the Revolution, when he took on the task of managing events at Kiel, but a flaw when it came to choosing the right way to respond to the confrontations in December 1918 and January 1919.[48] Ebert and Scheidemann are depicted as making a broadly good fist of their unenviable task of holding the Republic together, despite being buffeted by constantly-changing winds of fortune, but also as characterised by the patronising impatience of long-serving *Praktiker*, with a tendency to antagonise their more idealistic partners in SPD and USPD alike.[49] But Bernstein engages in far more extended critique—at times, *ad hominem* assaults—on individual characters who played a more dissident part in the Revolution, and it is in these moments that his partisanship comes most

strongly to the fore. Liebknecht is the main target of his ire, and Bernstein disparages him as a monomaniacal "desperado" who combined the superior arrogance of his thoroughly bourgeois lawyering background with the intransigent zeal he had copied from his Bolshevik paymasters.[50] Similar comments also appear about Barth and to a lesser extent Dittmann throughout *The German Revolution*, and in general Bernstein appears to have found the behaviour of the USPD a greater source of aggravation than that of the SPD.[51] But by comparison, his long-time sparring partner Luxemburg comes in for more sparing criticism, with Bernstein dismissing her lack of experience of Reichstag politicking as a foreigner and a woman and resenting her naïve opportunism in participating in the Spartacist uprising, but also deeply mourning her death as an irretrievable loss to the Republic.[52] Bernstein is even somewhat complimentary about the eccentric Bavarian USPD leader Kurt Eisner, and it is relatively clear that he is won over not by Eisner's substantive views, but by his unique combination of idealism and practical good sense—or to put it in classically Weberian terms, his ethic of ultimate ends and ethic of responsibility.[53]

Finally, Bernstein's approach to historiography is characterised by a consistent commitment to anti-essentialism and pluralism, especially where the role of class as a driving force of social change is concerned. In general, his account in *The German Revolution* subscribes strongly to the thesis that 'there was not just one Revolution', and he prefigures much more modern scholarship that seeks to decentre the events of 1918–19 from Prussia to other states—Bernstein focuses on Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg in detail—and from urban centres such as Berlin, Munich, Kiel, and Wilhelmshaven to their respective localities.[54] But as an avowedly socialist historian, his main concern is assessing the class character of the Revolution—and, by extension, that of all analogous periods of social unrest. Here, his central thesis is that socialist thinkers and activists urgently need to stop trying to look for single 'true' centres of classist movements.[55] Instead, they must become more sensitive to the great variety of different opinions that are possible within any single class—rather than arbitrarily elevating one of them as 'true' and dismissing the others as 'false'. As Bernstein observes in *How a Revolution Perished*:

> Generalisations such as "*the* bourgeoisie" and "*the* proletariat" are already of no use because in the bourgeois as well as the proletarian camp the most diverse factions existed and the most varied motives influenced people's minds.[56]

As social democrats were to become only too aware over the course of the interwar period, even a working class that had long been politically organised through party and trade union activism was quite capable of casting its ideological lot in with a plethora of rival directions—not just the varying flavours of socialism endorsed by the SPD, USPD, and KPD, but also the Christian-democratic and fascist offerings of *Zentrum*, the DNVP, and later the Nazis. Just as there was not just one Revolution, there was (and is) not just one proletariat—and, of course, not just one people.[57] But Bernstein goes even further: not only should socialist historians avoid the tendency to frame everything in neat bourgeois-proletarian class binaries, they should also stop trying to frame every social event in class terms entirely. With reference to the bloody June Days fighting in 1848, Bernstein remarks:

> [O]ne does not exhaust it if one describes it as a bloody intensification of the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. It does not represent a pure example of class struggle. This is not because workers also fought in front of the barricades, and members of the bourgeoisie behind them. Classes will never divide so absolutely that in moments of action every class party will not feature elements from classes other than its own in its ranks. But in June 1848, men fought against the proletarian-revolutionary party whose previous life and later behaviour showed that their entire feeling and thinking was far more with the working class than with the privileged, men who would under other circumstances have stood decidedly on the side of the workers. On the other hand, for some personalities who had not accompanied the workers onto the barricades but still *incited* them onto them, a true and a not merely temporary victory of the workers would have been the greatest inconvenience in the world. It was a piece of class struggle, provoked by the collective effect of irritations that for a great part did *not* stem from class contradictions, or at least not *those* class contradictions as which the June battle presented itself, and as which it will also always count historically.[58]

In other words, not every struggle is a class struggle. Attempting to read class into every instance of social conflict risks weakening the nuance and explanatory power of classist social analysis—and hoping that quite ordinary military conflicts may metastatise into class struggles (and then turned to the advantage of the proletariat) is little more than a wasteful misdirection of socialist energies.

This fetishistic class-centrism is, for Bernstein, not just a failing of socialist theory and historiography, but also a source of endless problems at the level of socialist strategy as well. He expresses considerable frustration at the attempts by all the socialist parties in the Revolution to present themselves as knowing exclusively and best what lay in the interests of the working class. Even assuming that Social Democracy as a movement and ideology was best placed to claim this mantle, the fact of the SPD-USPD split meant that neither faction could legitimately claim to hegemonise its correct interpretation as "in all respects the sole correct interpreter of the social-democratic idea, and the infallible representative of policy corresponding to it".[59] The sole concession Bernstein is prepared to make on this front is that, judging by the relative popularity of each of the three socialist parties, it was unambiguously the SPD who were the *predominant* (albeit in no way exclusive) authentic voice of German workers.[60] The less salubrious consequence of this competition over 'who speaks for the working class' was that plenty of non-proletarian elements sought to co-opt the revolutionary fervour of German proletarians for decidedly destructive aims. Bernstein draws an analogy with 1848 France, observing that many major figures in the revolutionary clubs were not even proletarians themselves, and entertained illusions and ambitions that were demonstrably divorced from the interests of the working class at the time.[61] The overall lesson from both the 1848 and 1918–19 cases for socialists of all stripes is simple: they must become sensitive to how easily the working population of any country that is going through a revolutionary period can be betrayed by people who claim to speak for it but are not part of it, and only want to pursue their own ends.

Situating Bernstein's Account: A User's Guide to the User's Guide

The themes that emerge from Bernstein's engagement with the German Revolution are ones that, in his view, any political historian of a socialist or social-democratic persuasion must take to heart if they are to give an honest account of the events they consider. Conversely, only accounts that take seriously the historiographical concerns he has highlighted are of any real use for theorists and activists committed to a *scientific* socialist understanding of the world around them—understanding that can inform effective and consequential action within it. For Bernstein, the German Revolution is a consummate example of what is at stake for Social

Democracy in the correct evaluation of historical events. A history of the Revolution that takes into account the objective constraints under which its protagonists were operating, and which pares away the layers of myth-making, wild speculation, and class reification that had grown up around it, would not come out as a tragic tale of failure and betrayal—unlike, for instance, a similarly honest account of the 1848 French Revolution and the Paris Commune—but rather as the positive founding-story of a successful socialist republican project. The significance for the left would be nothing short of immense. Establishing the German Revolution as an *encouraging* precedent would immediately present socialists with an alternative model to appeal to and emulate to rival the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia 1917–18; it would show that it is possible to have a revolution with socialist aims *and* outcomes that does not have to take a Blanquist (i.e., Leninist) form. Accordingly, Bernstein emphasises the positive elements that are often obscured in narratives about the German Revolution—the efficient good order with which the initial phase of transition was completed in November 1918, the typically fair and legal treatment of *Spartakus* rebels (with some obvious exceptions, including Luxemburg and Liebknecht), and the generous offer of collaboration the SPD made to the USPD on the day of the Kaiser's abdication. Yet, characteristically, he also wants to avoid pushing this positivity too far. If the German Revolution is to inspire anything, it should inspire an attitude of sober caution and critical self-reflection among later revolutionaries. The last thing the left needs is a crudely heroic 'legend of 1919' to mimic the 'legend of 1793', which he felt proved so distracting and destructive during the 1848 Revolution.[62]

More precisely, the lesson to be learned from Bernstein's account in *The German Revolution* is the same that he wanted his readers to draw from *How a Revolution Perished*—namely, that no revolution is ever permanent or inevitable, but needs careful and concerted management to keep it moving sustainably in a progressive direction. Bernstein's telling of the Revolution is a case-study in what can and what cannot be done, what a transformative progressive movement can and cannot set its sights on. His criterion for assessing such decisions is simple and straightforward: socialists can, and must, only pursue goals that they are sure that the complex organism of society is capable of absorbing without excessive or lasting damage.[63] Therein, in the last analysis, lies Bernstein's deep objection to Blanquism, Bolshevism, and other left enthusiasts of political revolution: they are so fixated on ensuring that the social organism looks a

certain way that they lose sight of whether or not it will actually survive the transformation. But his 'softly-softly', 'not too much too soon' approach to policy is less a version of the bourgeois 'there is no alternative' than it is an apologia for the incremental strategic achievements that must be accumulated as prerequisites for transformations. On that basis, he roundly criticises socialists who fail to grasp the importance of such incrementalism—as with the Spartacists who complained loudly about pro-SPD bias in the Central Council of Workers' Councils, despite having boycotted the original elections that could have assured them fair representation on that body.[64] There is a deep historicist core to Bernstein, in the sense that he has a sense of the necessary social trajectory at various scales. In his view, socialists who want to have a hope of effecting permanent change within society cannot start their bidding with the most radical possible government or policy first, but instead build up to it after letting more moderate options exhaust themselves. His aversion to forms of socialism that look like rash deviations from a steady progressive trajectory is a fundamental component of his entire outlook going back all the way to *Preconditions*, and he takes particular care in his account to highlight reforms that the Revolution brought that appeared superficially to be working solidly within the constraints of the *status quo*, but which were also quietly revolutionary in their own way.[65]

In other words, Bernstein offers an *unambiguously* social-democratic history of an *ambiguously* social-democratic revolution—an account that is committed to reclaiming the Revolution for the benefit of the Republic it brought into being. Yet this Republic ultimately failed less than 15 years later—with one of the most significant milestones in its demise, the Nazi takeover of power, taking place a mere six weeks after Bernstein's death in December 1932. This was, of course, a devastating posthumous blow to his hopes that Germany would act as a source of inspiration for socialists elsewhere in the world. But the chances of such failure were a very tangible prospect for Bernstein, who also laced his account with warnings—which now have nothing short of a prophetic ring about them—about the lurking threat of reaction and counter-revolution that the new Republic faced with every day of its continued existence. He saw Noske's reliance on the old *Kaiserreich*-era officer corps to put down the Spartacist uprising as having contributed directly to rehabilitating the military in the eyes of German society after its wartime excesses at home and at the front—the potential dangers of which were brought home to the Republic in stark terms by the Kapp-Lüttwitz *putsch*.[66] It was, put mildly, unwise for parties who

sought their legitimacy from their popular support to 'lean on' the military and other forces on the right to an excessive degree, as the example of 1848 showed how quickly that could lead democratic institutions to be eroded and eventually overpowered through an authoritarian *coup de main*.[67] In the end, it was not the DNVP and DVP that directly brought about the end of the Republic, but Bernstein was certainly right to warn of the likely durability of the aggressive nationalism they represented within the German population—although, like other social democrats, he underestimated the extent of this durability among the working class. In a similar way, his fears about the threat of left disunity were strongly borne out. Although most of the USPD did ultimately reunite with the SPD in September 1922—at Dittmann's behest—the KPD's insistence on a 'social fascism' line against the SPD damaged the credibility of Social Democracy among the working-class electorate, while the SPD's attempts to position itself as the obvious choice for anti-Bolshevism failed to convince the bourgeois/petty-bourgeois/proletarian nexus that opened the door to fascism in the 1930s.

But it was precisely his awareness of the urgency of these threats—unrivalled among social democrats except for, perhaps, Austromarxists such as Rudolf Hilferding—that motivated Bernstein's attempt to shore up the Republic with a supportive account of his first emergence. In this respect, the fact that it has not been Social Democracy but the radical left that has tried to claim the narrative and legacy of Revolution up to now—and largely succeeded in doing so unchallenged—is precisely what Bernstein was trying to avoid with his intervention. This would doubtless be a source of boundless dissatisfaction to him, as it would imply that the left as a whole has learned all the wrong lessons from 1918–19, and on that basis was setting itself up for yet more failures in future revolutionary moments. From a modern perspective, the picture is somewhat mixed. Over the course of the interwar years, it was the 1917 Russian Revolution that won out over its German rival in the socialist imaginary, and the adherents of Bolshevism in the USSR and among their supporters abroad took great pains to establish a 'legend (even cult) of 1917' over the subsequent course of the twentieth century. This process was cut short by the stagnation and collapse of the USSR and the communist bloc in the early 1990s, which heralded a two-decade nadir for socialist models of virtually any denomination, but it has now been reincarnated with the return of socialism to popularity in the wake of the 2007–9 financial crisis. Given this chequered record, a modern Bernsteinian would feel justified in insisting

that socialists engage with both 1917 and 1918–1919 and their legacies with the same degree of critical dispassion that Bernstein himself did for 1848.

In this light, Social Democracy may be able to take a modicum of comfort from the fact that, at the start of the twenty-first century, a different republican incarnation of Germany has begun to take steps to recognise and celebrate the crucial role the Revolution and the Weimar Republic played in its evolution. Certainly, it is a Germany that has had to suffer a second total military defeat, shorn of more of its former territory—including Bernstein's beloved Breslau, which he had represented in the Reichstag for a good share of the two decades before the Revolution—and with the cipher of war guilt exchanged for the irreparable burden of genocide. And it is a country with a proletarian left riven between—in Bernsteinian terms—dogmatic post-Bolshevik apologists and excessively bourgeois-accommodationist ultra-*Praktiker*, with neither threatening to win a parliamentary majority to implement a legislative road to socialism. Yet its appreciation for the true stature of the German Revolution within its history is rising nonetheless—which raises the prospect of a more concerted return to the events of 1918–19 as an object of study and source of theoretical insight. The aim of any such return must be to refocus attention on the Revolution and the Weimar period in their own right, and regalvanise interest in neglected theoretical and historical writing from and about both of them—as for the wider interwar period in Europe and beyond. In particular, it should seek to offer a new appraisal of the significance of 1918–19 for the study of revolutionary practices and political violence, and trace the continuities between interwar institutions within and beyond Weimar Germany and those that emerged in Europe after WW2. Bernstein, of course, must lie at the heart of all such efforts. It is here that his approach to studying the Revolution has the greatest contribution to make, and which should provide the context in which his account is read today.

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PART I

The German Revolution: History of the Emergence and First Working Period of the German Republic

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CHAPTER 2

Preface

The German Revolution does not yet have a detailed historical presentation to speak of that covers its course so far. The literature about it up to now consists of summary descriptions of its emergence and initial development, writings about certain events, or the effect of certain people on its course, critical tracts about the policy of its parties, writings about legal cases, official and unofficial reports and proclamations of various kinds, and other government and party records. Many of these are kept remarkably objective, others are characterised by tendentious partisanship, which does not shy away from crudely falsifying facts; some reports, especially the reports of the investigative commission of the Prussian *Landesversammlung* [*Land* Assembly] about the fateful disturbances in Berlin in January 1919, offer up highly valuable material, but even this has only partly been systematically processed—in short, there is a respectable number of publications on the history of the Revolution available, but as yet no more comprehensive historical work about it.

The work at hand sets out to fill this gap in the history of the first period of the Revolution. It is dictated by the wish to depict this period—which lasts from the outbreak of the Revolution to the election of delegates for the constitutive *Nationalversammlung* [National Assembly], so comprises the principal part of the government by the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* [Council of People's Deputies]—through as systematic an arrangement of the material as is possible within the framework of a still only moderately sizeable book. It concerns the presentation of a period in

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which the German Republic emerges and seeks to determine its content, but in doing so is afflicted with struggles that have the most fateful effect on the form it has ultimately assumed, and for its entire domestic and foreign policy. However, in our fast-moving time, an entire wreath of legends has woven itself around these struggles, so that not only the behaviour of the parties and persons who participated in them is judged quite wrongly in various ways, but its nature and significance are gauged completely wrongly as well. As a rule, they engage with these only from the perspective of the influence of certain personalities, whereby—depending on the partisan stance they adopt—they attribute responsibility to one or other of them. In any case, they still refer to the tactical perspectives by which these personalities let themselves be guided in their actions, aside from their passions and personal prejudices. But in fact, these struggles were about a contest [*Ringen*] between two fundamentally different conceptions of socialism and social development, which can be traced through the entire modern socialist movement, but of whose deeper historical significance only the fewest of those participating in these struggles were fully conscious. Rather, they only presented themselves to most of them in the guise of questions of tactical behaviour, or the method that was practical at the time, towards which they then adopted a purely practical stance—in which greater or lesser insight into the contexts and possibilities one can recognise is decisive. The task of the political historian, however, is to ascertain the deeper contradictions that underpin practical struggles, and bring them to view for the sake of evaluating them correctly.

The book at hand strives to proceed according to these maxims, but it has not for that reason left the factor of personal responsibilities out of consideration. On the contrary, I must be prepared for the accusation that I have repeatedly emphasised them more sharply than may be compatible with the impartiality of the historian. But in my view, such impartiality need not go further than the requirement of truth is concerned. Historical writing [*Geschichtsschreibung*] may not arbitrarily meddle with facts for the sake of the writer's partisan position. Towards them it must be objective, it must not exaggerate anything about them, and not conceal anything essential. On the other hand, it is not prohibited from expressing its individual verdict on events, as suits the writer's political standpoint. This book is not unpartisan [*parteilos*]. It deals with events that are of too incisive a significance for the fate of my own people and peoples in general for the author to have reconciled with his political conscience keeping to himself his verdict on the persons that have incurred responsibility for them. I

have made an effort to be fair, but I have laid no value on pleasing everyone. I am describing things I witnessed as well, which I was participating in as a fellow-fighter [*Mitkämpfer*]. Not so far in the foreground that I could be tempted to speak of my own actions in this book. But still so interested in it with all my feelings and thoughts as though I had also perceived everything that was done wrong in these struggles—where the fate of an entire people, where the shape of a Republic that had only just been achieved and the conditions of its further healthy development were at stake—as if it happened to me as well. Everything I lived through at the time came to mind again as I was writing this book, and so one may understand why in various places it has come out more subjectively than other works by this author.

A volume that will appear in future will address the period of the constitutive *Nationalversammlung* and what followed after, which must be presented to justify the title of the work overall, as it promises a history of the origins, the course, and the work of the German Revolution.[1]

Berlin-Schöneberg, in March 1921.

Eduard Bernstein.

Note

1. It appears that Bernstein originally intended *The German Revolution* to function as the first part of a larger work, covering the time after the installation of the *Nationalversammlung* on 6 February 1919. This would likely have included the discussions about the Versailles Treaty conditions and general disarmament, as well as the consultations over the rights, powers, and institutions set out in the new German constitution, up to the first Reichstag elections under the new republican regime on 6 June 1920. No such extended work was ever published, though some of his analysis of the early Weimar Republic found its way into his articles for *Vorwärts* and other periodicals during the 1920s.

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CHAPTER 3

Prologue

The German *Kaiserreich* of the Hohenzollern collapsed. The power that had acted as midwife for its rise, the policy of blood and iron [*Blut und Eisen*], was its gravedigger. It had grown to a prodigiously powerful position [*Machtstellung*]. Its political unity, the tearing-down of all economic-political boundaries in its interior, and an only temporarily-interrupted policy of trade agreements with a most-favoured-nation clause had proved themselves extremely beneficial to the development of its industry and trade. From a poor Germany, it had become, as its national economists proudly calculated precisely in the years 1912, 1913, 1914, a "rich Germany". The Helfferichs, the Steinmann-Buchers and their colleagues demonstrated that Germany's national wealth had in numerical terms partly reached and partly even outstripped that of the Western powers England and France, who were once so far ahead of Germany in this regard.[1] It appeared no less dominant [*machtgebietend*] in the military domain. It had hothoused its naval fleet to a height that was only exceeded by the island empire Great Britain, and its land forces were surpassed, though in numbers by those of Russia, in their true potential capability [*Leistungsfähigkeit*] by those of no other country. Hence, with a certain right, so far at least as Central and Western Europe were concerned, could the third of the Hohenzollern Kaisers one day utter the proud statement that without Germany's say-so "no shot would ring out in Europe". Yet this consciousness of his own power [*Machtbewußtsein*] became his doom.

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It lies outside the framework of this work to analyse the driving forces that brought about the outbreak of war in July 1914, which then grew into a world war. One thing however may be undeniably observed: if the decided *will* had existed on the part of those governing Germany not to let it come to war, then it would indeed also have been avoided. But precisely this will was missing. This power-consciousness had become conceit [*Machtdünkel*]. Wilhelm II von Hohenzollern deluded himself that he was master over war and peace to such an extent that he could issue licences to wage war [*Kriegslizenzen*], as it were, just as one issues hunting licences, without punishment: this war—Austria-Hungary's war against Serbia—may happen, and woe betide him who interferes in it! That was the motto for Imperial Germany's behaviour in the fateful July Days of 1914, and because the rest of Europe did not want to comply with it to such an extent, it took the report of a border incident as cause to declare the war that set the greater part of Europe ablaze and brought about the collapse of the three empires on the European mainland.

Even if one wants to free Wilhelm II from blame for having wanted the war on the grounds of his protestations—and one may perhaps have to concede that he lacked a will to act with full certainty—his responsibility for the war is not removed by doing so by a long way. Even the hardly unduly demanding ethics of religious communities declares him who could have prevented a murder and did not do so to be complicit in it. But with the greatness of power grows the greatness of responsibility. Neither subjectively nor objectively did something undeserved happen to Wilhelm II when he was forced to step down.

His responsibility is also not lessened by the fact that over the course of the war, his government repeatedly declared itself ready for peace negotiations. For all these declarations lacked the element that could have made them effective in view of what had happened at the war's start. Wilhelm II only ever wanted a peace that would have allowed him to return home a *victor*. Let us remember his decree to the German army on the occasion of the peace offer of December 1916: "As victor, *I* offered peace to our enemies." Even if they had been ready for peace negotiations on the enemy side at the time, this language would have been enough, given the constitution of the rulers of England, France, etc., to kill off this readiness.

With this observation the behaviour of the statesmen on the enemy side should naturally not yet be declared to be justified. But here it is not a question of weighing the European powers' ledger of guilt against one another. It is about the responsibility of Wilhelm II and his government

towards their own people. They knew who they were dealing with, what points of view prevailed in the decisive circles of the enemies, and hence had—if they honestly wanted to spare their people the continuation of this destructive war—to subordinate their language and their proposals to this purpose. But that did *not* happen right until the end. And it did not happen, not only because personal vanity bristled at it, but also because *the system did not allow it*. Out of Ludendorff and his colleagues, who dragged out the war after it had already been shown without doubt that it was not to be won, expressed the *system* whose bearers they were. For the sake of this system, whose existence they knew was tied to emerging from the war as victors, they ultimately put at risk the fate of the entire nation. Only a radical break with this could have spared it a bitter end. But none of the statesmen who took the rudder of the Reich in their hand one after the other could bring themselves to do this. The Bethman-Hollwegs, the Michaelis, the Max von Badens wanted to have the system without its logic, and foundered at this contradiction.[2] The Ludendorffs, Tirpitzes, etc., were the better logicians, and brought the *Kaiserreich* to its ruin. Born out of victories, it had to go under once these failed to materialise.[3] But Germany as a unit could only be preserved if the social power that signified that radical break in its entire nature and tradition took its liquidation in hand—*Social Democracy*.

Notes

1. Karl Theodor Helfferich (1872–1924), German economist and banker, active in the colonial sections of the Foreign Ministry in late-Wilhelmine Germany, national-conservative and antisemitic politician in the early Weimar Republic. Arnold Steinmann-Bucher (1849–1942), Swiss-German economist and publicist, supporter of economic nationalism and industrial cartels.
2. Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg (1856–1921), German progressive-liberal politician, Reich Chancellor 1909–17, sought to bridge the gulf between social-democratic and conservative Reichstag factions through a *Burgfrieden* ('party truce') policy. Georg Michaelis (1857–1936), German lawyer and national-conservative politician, Reich Chancellor July–November 1917, embittered opponent of parliamentarism in the German constitution. Prince Maximilian von Baden (1867–1929), German liberal politician and Reich Chancellor October–November 1918, sought unsuccessfully to transform Germany into a constitutional monarchy.

3. Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937), German general and *völkisch*-conservative politician, deputy leader of the *Oberste Heeresleitung* (German Supreme Army Command) under Paul von Hindenburg, originator of the 'stab-in-the-back' myth and participant in the 1920 Kapp-Lüttwitz and 1923 Hitler *putsches* against the Weimar Republic. Alfred von Tirpitz (1849–1930), German admiral and national-conservative politician, supported extreme-right extra-parliamentary movements that rejected peace negotiations and advocated government by military caesarism.

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CHAPTER 4

The *Reich* Leadership Before the Revolution

Let us go through a short outline of the events that led to the Revolution of the November Days in 1918.

In July 1918 the offensive power of the German Western Army broke, as did its defensive power in August 1918. Attempts to rebuild it by shortening the front line failed. The soldiers were no longer to be deceived about the true state of affairs by any apparatuses of pacification [*Beruhigungsapparate*]. The editor of the *Berliner Volkszeitung*, Dr. Karl Vetter, describes the effect that the recognition of the increasing improvement of the position and equipment of the enemy troops had on the mental constitution of the German soldiers vividly, if perhaps a little too impressionistically, in his pamphlet "This is Ludendorff's fault". The same is portrayed more calmly but not for that reason any less arrestingly in Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt's work "Why did the collapse on the Western Front come about?", which contains a "Memorandum by a German *Landwehr* soldier" that the author delivered to General Ludendorff.[1] The German soldier saw how ever more new reinforcements of battle-ready squads raised the number of troops on the enemy side, ever more new easily-mobile tanks bolstered their artillery, ever more new swarms of fliers ensured its supremacy in aerial combat, and to a proportionate degree lost his belief in the possibility of a victory or even of continued endurance. In the anxiety caused by this, and exacerbated by the irregularities and often demanding inequalities in the distributions of costs, he required no influence by agitators to become convinced that continuing the war was

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a futile sacrifice of men. But since he had gained this conviction, and still had to watch these futile sacrifices being made, he had to be all the more disposed to lend an ear to those who preached to him the necessity of a thorough transformation in the political institutions of his country, and the abolition of a system that demanded these sacrifices.

That socialist-revolutionary agitation took place in the *Heer* [the Imperial German Army] shall not be denied. In fact, the military authorities had themselves made sure of it by conscripting people who had made themselves unpopular at home because of such agitation, and sending them to the front to punish them. No wonder then if those who were disciplined in this way made no secret of their views to their comrades, and sought to influence them in a revolutionary vein on the spot. But faced with the great number of troops those were still too few to be able to achieve anything substantial, if they did not encounter conditions that already took away the soldiers' belief in the slogans proclaimed to them from above by quite different means of manipulation, and with it their inclination to expose themselves limply to the hail of enemy guns. In England, for the entire time that the war lasted, there was a very keen propaganda against the war and military service, which could move fairly freely and became widely known through the public trials of the many conscientious objectors. And even so it did not prevent English troops in general from doing their soldierly duty as they would have done had that agitation not existed. In all countries, the soldier is usually a fatalist, who only runs away if he sees a situation as completely lost. Germany did not lose the war because the soldiers failed as a result of incitements; rather, the soldiers ultimately failed because they recognised that the war was lost.

That they were not wrong in seeing this, incidentally, emerges clearly from the statements of the highest *Heer* leaders Ludendorff and Hindenburg before the committee of enquiry of the *Nationalversammlung*. Both claimed that they insisted on transitioning to unrestricted submarine warfare in winter 1916/17 because it offered "the only possibility" of winning the war. In that lay the admission that, if this submarine warfare failed to achieve its goal, the war was not to be won at all. But in mid-1918, no further doubt was possible that the submarine war had not and could not fulfil its purpose. Indeed, America had brought an armed might [*Truppenmacht*] with full equipment across the ocean that had been declared entirely impossible in 1916 on the part of the German *Heer* leadership. Germany's allies, by contrast, Turkey, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary, were weakened—how could there be a possibility of enduring the war any

longer? It was lost, and its continuation was the desperate game of one who has gone bankrupt, who offers his very last in the hope for some lucky accident that lies outside any sensible calculation. Here, the very last were humans, made of flesh and blood, who saw how things stood, and were not to be handled like playing-pieces in a game. The dissolution of the *Heer* began. Individual sets of troops held doggedly onto certain positions, but control of the whole thing slipped out of the *Heer* leadership's hands, and with complete disintegration and its then-unavoidable destructive defeat before their eyes, they sent *Oberst* [Colonel] Heye to the Reich government on 24 September with the message that they could not vouch for the army anymore, and that an armistice needed to be signed as quickly as possible.

Retrospectively, these gentlemen declared that they had been mistaken in their estimation of the situation at the front, and that their defensive capacity had not yet been exhausted. That speaks very strongly against their capacity for comprehension, but proves nothing against the fact of the German defeat and the fault of Ludendorff and his colleagues for having let it come to this devastating catastrophe. After all, it had been they who had exerted their entire influence to thwart every action for peace that could have spared Germany from making its existence dependent on fortuitous military outcomes. For prolonging the war would have meant no more than speculating on chance. All the calculable factors of power let the victory of the enemy side appear inevitable. It was only a question of the possibility of an advance that would have increased the bloody costs of the war but simply made the final outcome worse for Germany.

When the *Heer* leadership's message was delivered to it, the government at home was left with nothing but to carry out the steps it demanded. The demand, as then-Reich Chancellor Max von Baden put it in the manuscript of a speech due to have been held before the upper house in Baden, had been presented to it almost as an ultimatum.

He had namely suggested to the *Heer* leadership that it initially publish a detailed programme of Germany's war aims, which should make clear to the world their agreement with the fundamental principles proclaimed by President Wilson, and add the remark that Germany was ready to make heavy national sacrifices for these principles. But this was not fast enough for the military types. They were champing at the bit.

"At this, the military authorities replied to me", it says in the piece, "that we could not wait for the effect of such an announcement any longer; the situation at the front demanded the offer of an armistice within 24

hours."[2] Even more incriminating is the following account by Reich Chancellor Hertling, which his son, *Rittmeister* [Captain] Graf Karl von Hertling, published:

> On 1 October 1918 Hertling spoke about his successor with the Kaiser, who could not yet settle on Max von Baden. Then Ludendorff strode into the room unannounced and immediately asked, utterly incensed: "Is the new government not ready yet?", to which the Kaiser retorted fairly brusquely "I can't work miracles!" To which Ludendorff: "But the government *must* be formed immediately, because the offer of peace has to be put out today." The Kaiser: "You should have told me that 14 days ago!"

One may gauge from this how brazen it is now to shift the blame for the encouraging effect that the armistice offer had on the militarists and rabble-rousing patriots on the enemy side afterwards onto the civilian government and the Revolution.

Max von Baden had become the third successor of Bethmann-Hollweg in the office of Chancellor shortly beforehand. The third within the space of a year and a quarter. That too indicates the instability of the internal situation of the German Reich.

In summer 1917, Bethmann-Hollweg had seen himself required to step down. Not that the Reichstag majority, which differed from him in the question of war aims, would have toppled him. He was toppled because it declared that it could not support him any longer against his rivals on the right, after he did not want to—or even could not—agree to a proclamation it had prepared for a peace without annexations. What happened at that time was extremely characteristic for conditions in Imperial Germany. Bethmann's fall was engineered by the Conservatives and the right-wing National Liberals, who only formed a minority in the Reichstag, with the leaders of the *Heer* and the *Marine* [the Imperial German Navy]—for whom this in no way anti-militarist statesman was "too wimpish"—as instigators. But in the Reichstag, the Majority Socialists, *Zentrum* [Centre], and Progressive People's Party had formed a coalition that had taken up the cause of bringing about a compromise peace settlement [*eines Ausgleichfriedens*]. Its leading mind was the *Zentrum* deputy Mathias Erzberger, who had come to the conviction that Germany's allies stood before their collapse, and that Germany on its own would not be able to stand against the most extremely determined enemies in the long run, and who now led the fight against those who wanted to continue the war

[*Kriegsverlängerer*] with the same energy with which he had originally fought on their side. Whether an unreserved assent to this coalition's proclamation by the Reich government would then have brought about peace one can doubt, since for this purpose it still left much to be desired. But what is certain is that its rejection, enforced by the military party, sealed Germany's fate.

Bethmann's immediate successor was not a man according to the vote of the Reichstag majority, but rather the sanctimonious bigot Dr. Michaelis, who was chosen by the military types, and who sought to brush over the contradiction between the war aims he strove for and the declaration by the majority of the Reichstag with the explanation that he could accept it—let us repeat it *verbatim*—"as I understand it". That was all that was needed to thoroughly discredit it in the camp of Germany's enemies. But since the situation was becoming ever more serious, the Reichstag majority also did not let itself be stalled for long by such equivocation. After four months, Michaelis had to resign, and was replaced by Graf Hertling, who belonged to *Zentrum*. He was not short on parliamentary skilfulness, but could not manage the feat of leading German politics in such a way that it aligned unequivocally with the fundamental principles laid down in the declaration of the Reichstag majority.[3] The hybrid nature of Reich politics was glaringly illuminated only a short time after he took office by the peace settlement at Brest-Litovsk, which made an impression that could not be erased by any dialectic. Rather, it was only strengthened all the more by the fact that the military party forced through the resignation of Freiherr von Kühlmann, who had been appointed Foreign Secretary, after he had made himself unpopular with them with the remark that peace was not to be achieved through arms alone. But since the Majority Socialists lacked the determination to force the nomination of a Chancellor who did not merely see his task as issuing statements that could be interpreted at will, Hertling was able to stay in office until it was too late. A sick man, who was not long to survive his resignation, he accepted his dismissal as the German Western Army was already in full retreat. Into his place stepped Prince Max von Baden, who counted as a very liberal politician and sincere opponent of all annexation plans, but who became a person who could not possibly conclude peace barely a moment after introducing himself as such to the Reichstag, because a brief written by him shortly beforehand to the Prince von Hohenlohe became known in which he had expressed views and intentions that sounded very different.

The army in hasty retreat, whose evil effects on the country the *Heer* leadership exacerbated still further by immediately turning wide areas that it had to give up into wasteland; a Kaiser on the point of departing, to whom the nation no longer paid heed, and whose deposition the victors had made the precondition for any peace negotiation; a Chancellor in office whose words were no longer taken seriously—that is how things stood when an insurrection of *Marine* troops, caused by an insane enterprise on the part of the fleet leadership, made the political Revolution break out.

Notes

1. Karl Vetter (1897–1957), German journalist, publicist, and republican politician, collaborated with Kurt Tucholsky and Carl von Ossietzky on pacifist and anti-war projects. Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt (1873–1964), German pacifist politician, supporter of religious disaffiliation movements and human rights activism, one of the first victims of Nazi expatriation.
2. [Ed. B.—reprinted, among others, in Ferd. Runkel, *The German Revolution*, p. 54.]
3. Georg von Hertling (1843–1919), German centrist politician, Reich Chancellor November 1917–September 1918, reluctantly laid the foundations for the parliamentarisation of the German constitution and moved towards a negotiated peace settlement for WW1 under the pressure of the centre-left *Interfraktioneller Ausschuss* (Inter-Party Committee).

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CHAPTER 5

The Dawning of the Revolution

"They have lied to us and betrayed us." Those were the words that the Conservative party leader von Heydebrand is supposed to have called out in despair when his party colleague Graf Westarp—whom the acting Reich Chancellor von Payer had informed of the dire news about the collapse of the army in a quickly convened private conference, along with one representative of each of the other parties—delivered this to his party.[1] With greater right than the recently dethroned king and his friends could and can the broad mass of the German people say this of itself. How it was systematically lied to and betrayed about the origin of the war and its course while it lasted, so it is still today. And it is precisely the party colleagues of Herr von Heydebrand who now put in the most unrestrained efforts in this campaign of lies [*Lügenfeldzug*]. Still the German people is fed the lie in pamphlets of all kinds that Germany was insidiously "*forced*" into war in 1914 by its malicious and envious enemies—some lie even more brazenly and claim that we were outright *assaulted*. Still they describe the war to it as if on the German side only victories were fought for and won, and at most occasionally troops who had pressed ahead too far were "pulled back" for strategic reasons. Not only in the *Chronology of the War* by Major-General Metzler, which appeared in 1915 with Reclam, is the great *Battle of the Marne*, which lasted for several days, and which belongs to the decisive battles of world history, completely concealed in this way; in the brochure by *Geheimer Studienrat* [Education Undersecretary] Jaenicke, *World War, Revolution, Constitution*, which

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appeared in November 1919, the uninformed German reader is also deceived by the following untrue turns of phrase about the fact of the tremendous defeat of the German Crown Prince's army, which ended on 12 September 1914:

> But the German armies had moved too far away from their supply sources. *Hence* they had to turn back at the Marne, especially considering that they met with strong resistance from the Paris garrison and Joffre's other reserves. After *victorious rearguard actions* they only halted behind the Aisne and the Oise.[2]

In a similar way, the outcome of important naval battles is reinterpreted into their opposite. Of the skirmish at Skagerrak (31 May 1916), which ended with the German fleet quitting the field under the protective cover of fog, it says: "The English announced their obvious defeat to all the world as a great victory!" In fact the opposite had happened. The English leadership had at first only candidly reported the ships they had lost and refrained from any remark about victory or defeat, whereas the German leadership reported a glittering success and claimed not to have lost a single large ship right until the debris that was washed onto the Norwegian coast compelled them to admit the loss of the battleship *Pommern*.

But one can only achieve limited effects with such false accounts. They are possibly most likely to fail with the troops. There, word spreads naturally about the truth faster than among the civilian population. Just as in the land army itself, at the start of autumn 1918 they recognise among the ranks of the marines that the war is lost, that undertaking every attack means useless sacrifice of men, and absurdly delays the necessary peace settlement. Towards the end of October 1918, the announcement that the *Marine* leadership wants to let things come to a new naval battle on the grandest scale, to at least cause the English the loss of as great a part of their fleet as possible, brings the crews of the German warships stationed at Kiel into great uproar, and provokes the crew of the ship-of-the-line *Markgraf* into the first larger revolt on 28 October. They refuse to weigh anchor, and prevent the ship from setting sail by occupying the capstans. When other ships are led through the Kiel Canal to Cuxhaven and from there to the Jade Bight, their crews likewise become convinced that they were dealing with a desperate strike, which could only have losses of men and a worsening of the peace conditions as a result. On one ship after another, the refusal to set sail is repeated. However, it is not yet a

revolutionary movement. The crews of various ships formulated and issued the following resolution:

> If the Englishman attacks us, we will stand our ground and defend our coasts to the last, but *we ourselves will not attack*. We will not sail further than Heligoland. Failing that, we will douse the engines.

Insurrectionists do not speak like that. Certainly, on several ships already the previous year there had been demonstrations by sailors who classed themselves with Independent Social Democracy, and they had been suppressed brutally enough to garner the sympathies of their comrades for the victims of this repression. But this agitation had still only included minorities, and would not have been in a position to lead to a general revolt, if ample material for such a one had not otherwise also piled up and been set alight through repressive measures.

On 30 and 31 October on various ships, disregarding the above resolution, the order was given to weigh anchor, which was answered accordingly by ripping the fire out from under the boilers and other measures, which made a warlike action impossible. There follow reprimands and threats from the side of the officers, which on some ships escalate to arrests on a wider scale. In particular, such mass punishments are meted out in Wilhelmshaven to the ship-of-the-line *Großer Kurfürst* and in Kiel, where the third squadron had been ordered back to, the ship *Friedrich der Große*. This blows the lid off the whole business.

On Sunday 3 November 1918 a protest gathering takes place in Kiel on the large exercise field, which is attended by thousands of *Marine* personnel, and which turns into a great procession, which demands the release of those arrested after listening to passionate speeches. The procession is halted in its march on the navy detention facility by armed petty officers and cadets, who demand that it dispersed. Its members' refusal to obey is met with live gunfire. 8 people are killed, 29 wounded, the others turn and flee, and—on the next day, 4 November, the whole *Marine* is in uproar. Officers who try to oppose their sailors are mistreated; on the ship-of-the-line *König*, which is flying the battle flag, things come to shooting, in which the ship's commander falls, and around noon the sailors are masters of all the ships as well as the harbour, and the entire garrison of Kiel joins them. A division of hussars that is dispatched from the Hamburg suburb Wandsbeck to pacify the insurrectionists has to turn back.

Now, a soldiers' council is formed, and the governor of Kiel, who had called on the sailors in a directive to submit their wishes to him, is presented after consultation in the trade union hall with a programme of radical demands, of which the most important are:

> The release of each and every prisoner and those who are politically interned. Complete freedom of speech and press. Appropriate treatment of the troops and abolition of the duty to salute. Full recognition of the workers' and soldiers' council. Officers who declare themselves in agreement with its measures are welcome, others have to quit their service without any claim to be provided for. Desistance from all security measures that lead to bloodshed. The workers' and soldiers' council deals with all measures for the protection of property. The setting-sail of the fleet has to be avoided in all circumstances.

The governor agreed with a part of the demands, and defers his final answer until the arrival of the government representatives, who had been dispatched in response to a request by telegraph, and who were already on their way. These were the Democrat Haußmann, who had been appointed Secretary of State, and the Social-Democrat Gustav Noske.[3] The result of the consultations held with these is the resolution to approve the demands. Its announcement is received with general jubilation. After the demands are accepted, the sailors commit to maintaining unconditional order, and consent to a notice which announces that anyone who is caught in the act of plundering is to be court-martialled and shot on the spot. Haußmann returns to Berlin. Noske receives an office in the station command centre, and becomes *de facto* governor of Kiel at the wishes of the workers. Days later, on 5 November, the workers of Kiel go on a general strike and form workers' councils, to which the soldiers' councils that have already been formed attach themselves. The city with the largest of the German naval bases, as this one is, lies in the hands of the proletariat. To complete the committee, two leaders of the Independents, the Reichstag deputies Haase and Ledebour, are called to Kiel by the workers.

And the torrent became a flood. Still on the same day, armoured cars flying the red flag enter Hamburg and Lübeck, which join the uprising. In Lübeck, public authority [*die öffentliche Gewalt*] was turned over to the hands of the soldiers' council without bloodshed, but in Hamburg, already on the evening of 5 November, after a mass demonstration in favour of the Kiel resolutions, it comes to a clash with the military, in which shots are fired. On 6 November, the military in Hamburg likewise shoots with

machine guns at a procession of shipyard workers who have gone on general strike, which do not follow the command to turn about, leaving behind 9 dead. The result is a mass protest, plundering of weapons shops, and the storming and looting of the arsenal located at Altona.

In Lübeck, the soldiers' council proclaims that public authority has been transferred into its hands in the following appeal on the evening of 5 November:

> Since this evening, Lübeck's power is in our hands. We hereby declare that our cause serves comrades at the front as well as here at home. A thorough end has to be made with the corruptive conditions and the military dictatorship of yesterday. The purpose of our cause is an immediate armistice and peace. We ask the population of Lübeck to keep as calm as possible. We will undertake nothing that could disturb the apparatuses of maintaining order. Everything goes on as it did before. We expect ready and willing cooperation from the population. We can observe that these transformations of military matters in Lübeck have proceeded and will hopefully continue to proceed bloodlessly. We caution against riots, plunderings and robbery will be punished by death. The distribution of food remains in the hands of the civil administration.
>
> The Soldiers' Council

Not without clashes with military types, but without bloodshed thanks to the defection of the troops, Bremen also joined the insurgency even on the same day. Military authority transfers to a commission that comprises the oldest soldier in the garrison, two officers, and four representatives of the troops, so that the latter have the majority in it. Besides this, a workers' council is formed.

On the following day, the movement spreads West—Hanover, Braunschweig, Köln, etc., and also South, towards the capital Berlin. Before it seizes it, Magdeburg, Leipzig, Dresden are in revolt too. The entire Northwest falls into the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

But it is not yet a comprehensive revolution directed at changing the entire constitution of the Reich, even though among the ranks of the fighters there is no shortage of people who consciously steer on towards this goal. No mass movement is complete without such elements. The impetus towards them initially always comes from individuals who, even if they are only following the spur of the moment, at a given point in time put out the word that now suddenly spreads from mouth to mouth and sets people's spirits ablaze. If retrospectively the various socialist factions

argue over their credit for the uprising, then they will all be partly right. They had all recognised that the old state of things could not abide anymore, and each of them in its own way spread this recognition among their supporters. Without this, the generality of the movement would have been impossible. In most places, the Majority socialists were by far the stronger association, and their influence on the workers was so great that any action they had set themselves against would have broken on this resistance. Why it remained incomplete, a glance at the proceedings in the Reichstag and the government in the weeks since the arrival of the desperate mail from the great general staff shows.

That the sailors had seen things correctly, the Majority socialist Friedrich Stampfer, who was informed by government authorities, confirms in his memoir *9th November* (Berlin, 1919, Vorwärts-Buchhandlung). There, he writes:

> Later, it transpired that the sailors had been *right* when they did not believe in the harmless character of the alleged manoeuvre voyage. It had been intended to let the fleet approach at Heligoland behind a barrier chain of U-boats, to tempt out the English and give the U-boats the opportunity to attack them. The plan for a sea battle on a grand scale! And this plan was conceived and was supposed to be carried out *after* Germany had sought an *armistice* and *peace* with a lively affirmation that it shied away from further useless sacrifices! The authors of this soldierly brave but politically idiotic and criminal plan later insisted naïvely that by showing the unbroken might of the German fleet they had wanted to improve Germany's position in the armistice and peace negotiations.[4]

In fact carrying out this plan would self-evidently have had the opposite effect, and would have worsened the conditions for Germany still further. The aftereffect of the sinking of the German warships interned at Scapa Flow, which stemmed from the same lines of thought, has amply proved that. Hence, Stampfer says further, quite rightly:

> Rather, the troops demonstrated *healthy human reason* and *political instinct* by very energetically refusing to participate in this planned farewell show. If it is true that every right finds its limit in its obvious misuse, then the right of superiors to issue commands [*das Befehlsrechts der Vorgesetzten*] had reached this limit here.
>
> The revolution had become a necessity.

Notes

1. Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa (1851–1924), German lawyer and national-conservative politician, supported pan-German movements and opposed finance reform and abolition of the three-class franchise. Kuno Friedrich Viktor von Westarp (1864–1945), German jurist, civil servant, and national-conservative politician, major advocate of unrestricted submarine warfare during WW1. Friedrich Ludwig von Payer (1847–1931), German lawyer and progressive-liberal politician, Deputy Reich Chancellor November 1917–November 1918, strongly supported democratisation of the German constitution and a negotiated peace settlement.
2. [Ed. B.—with my added emphasis.]
3. Conrad Haußmann (1857–1922), German progressive-liberal politician, one of the primary advocates of constitutionalisation and democratisation in the Reich, as well as a negotiated peace settlement, briefly Secretary of State Without Portfolio under von Baden. Gustav Noske (1868–1946), German basket-maker, trade unionist, journalist, and social-democratic politician, *de facto* first Governor of Kiel after its sailors' uprising at the outbreak of the German Revolution, from December 1918 SPD member of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* tasked with military affairs, led the government response to the January 1919 Spartacist uprising and was long held responsible by communists for the ensuing deaths of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.
4. Friedrich Stampfer (1874–1957), German journalist and social-democratic politician, editor-in-chief of the SPD's party organ *Vorwärts* 1916–1933, one of the first victims of Nazi expatriation.

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CHAPTER 6

Government and Social Democracy from the Start of October to 9 November 1918

How differences of opinion in Germany's Social Democracy regarding conduct in war led to its split must be presumed to be known in this work. The effect of this split had been that the wing of Social Democracy that held itself to be bound to authorise the Reich leadership war credits fell into an ambiguous stance towards it. It could not authorise it the means to wage war without depriving its own criticism of the leadership's methods of waging it of their efficacy, whereby this criticism took on an unrealistic tinge. Meanwhile, of the opponents of war credit authorisation some became enemies of the old social-democratic politics entirely, and took up the traditions of the Blanquist movement, which was directed immediately towards political overthrow. The gulf between the credit authorisers and the credit refuseniks became wider. But the latter, whose left wing had constituted itself in Easter 1917 as the party of Independent Social Democracy, disaggregated into social democrats and members of the Blanquist-revolutionary *Spartakus* League or the equally anti-reformist *Gruppe Internationale*.

Not only in the Reichstag but also in the country itself the credit authorisers were in the sizeable majority at that time. They had at their disposal more than three-quarters of the social-democratic newspapers—partly from the start of the conflict onwards, partly by exploiting the state of war to take over organs that lay in the hands of the opposition—and could thus influence the workers in accordance with their view without pause, while the opposition only controlled its own papers in individual

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constituencies, which on top of everything were severely harassed by censorship, and in the main was reliant on underground propaganda, which incidentally could only contribute to creating a mood for conspiratorial tendencies.

From the start, the Majorityists [*Mehrheitler*] had let there be no want of declarations in favour of a negotiated peace [*Verständigungsfrieden*]. Yet these could make no impression on the socialists of the Entente countries so long as they were a mere accompaniment to the authorisation of war credits to a government in which they saw, not unjustly, the cause of the war. Things went the same with the speeches for such a peace, which the eloquent leader of the Majority socialists, Philipp Scheidemann, held in great gatherings from summer 1916 onwards, and then published as brochures.[1] What I said above applies to them as well, that they were not believed in the enemy camp. The parliamentary activity for peace, which the Majority socialists undertook in conjunction with *Zentrum* and the Progressive People's Party in July 1917, met with more regard. But even this activity failed to have an effect, and had to fail, because it was not accompanied by so strong a pressure on Wilhelm II that he could not possibly present the Reichstag with the ludicrous interlude of Herr Michaelis, the Reich Chancellor after the *Heer* leadership's heart. Why his successor Graf Hertling was also not the man to persuade the enemy powers that the dominion of the militarists in Germany had come to its end was noted in the previous chapter. To the Peace of Brest-Litovsk, which stood in contradiction to all their lovely declarations about a lawful peace [*Rechtsfrieden*], came under his chancellorship the ambiguous game with Ukraine, which pushed back the possibility for a general peace settlement ever further; the state of siege at home was intensified; and the electoral reform for Prussia, which had become due, was delayed out of fear of the conservatives for so long that the collapse of the Western Army and the determined declarations of the governments of the Entente as well as President Wilson that they would under no circumstances make peace with a government under Wilhelm II created a revolutionary situation in Germany. Through publications by the Bolshevist government in Russia from the tsarist secret archives, which were in the first instance directed against the Entente, Wilhelm II was also so exposed that he had become internationally a downright impossible case. His exchange of letters carried out with Nicholas II at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, where he sought to poison the Tsar against England at the same time as he was

flattering it, was generally received as proof of his duplicity, which was rare even for persons in his position.

To improve the situation, Hertling's successor in office, Prince Max von Baden, took besides representatives of the Progressive People's Party and *Zentrum* two Majority socialists into his cabinet as well, namely Gustav Bauer as Secretary of State for a Reich Labour Office [*Reichsarbeitsamt*] that was to be established, and Philipp Scheidemann as Secretary of State without a particular office ("without portfolio"). Yet he deceived himself if he believed that he could thereby save the throne. Certainly, both the social democrats had, in agreement with their party, made their entry into government merely dependent on its commitment to their peace programme, as well as on the rearrangement of the Reich constitution along the lines of raising the parliament to have decisive power [*ausschlaggebende Macht*], the radical democratisation of the franchise, and similar reforms, which were still compatible with a constitutional monarchy at a pinch, and accordingly dedicated their activity in the first instance to bring about an armistice as quickly as possible, elaborate the relevant bills, and ensure their parliamentary passage. But it was clear that for them this was not a matter of securing the throne or the dynasty, but rather only about saving the German people and speedily bringing about peace. When over the course of October 1918, Wilson pointblank indicated that no peace would be made with Wilhelm II, the call for him to step down hence immediately sounded ever more energetically in the social-democratic Majority press. When he took a long time to do so, Scheidemann directed a memorandum to the Reich Chancellor at the end of October, in which he explained in detail that Wilhelm II's relinquishing the crown had become imperative, if Germany should not fall prey to the most ruinous destruction. But the Hohenzoller was not to be moved to step down so easily. The immediate effect of his writing was rather only that Wilhelm II left Berlin on 30 October 1918 and headed to the supreme headquarters, where he believed himself secure.

Beforehand—on 28 October—he had still given his constitutionally necessary signature to the bills about the full parliamentarisation of the Reich government, which had been discussed from 22 to 26 October in the Reichstag sessions and proposed for adoption. At the same time, the social-democratic Majority faction had allowed itself to be moved to defer for now the question of the monarchic head with reference to the danger that compelling Wilhelm II to step down would provoke a countermovement in the individual states and could put Germany into anarchic

conditions. But they were united in thinking that the days of Wilhelm II's Kaisership were numbered, and that his son Wilhelm had become even more impossible. Once he had reached the headquarters at Spa, Wilhelm II for his part told Minister Drews, who had travelled after him to notify him about Scheidemann's memorandum, that his stepping down would mean delivering Germany over to the Entente, and carry terrible disintegration in its wake, and that he could hence not take the responsibility of stepping down, but would remain in his office. And yet in the higher military circles they were toying with the madcap idea of reverting to renewed resistance with the help of reliable troops, since Germany was "not yet defeated". For such an enterprise the phrase 'long-shot gamble' [*Hazardspiel*] is obviously far too mild. Criminal insanity was the right word.

The insurrection by the *Marine* troops and the uprisings that joined it in the port cities thoroughly put an end to all plans of this kind by military types who had lost their heads. As soon as their scope and character was recognised, which admittedly took several days—since the telegraph, which was still under military censorship, initially only offered very understated reports about them—they resonated in the strongest terms among workers all over the country. As was only natural, the members of the league of *Spartakus* groups and the more radical elements of Independent Social Democracy who were allied to them bestirred themselves with particular zeal.

The *Spartakus* League had held a conference in Gotha on 7 October 1918 at which it decided in favour of the policy of the Russian Bolshevists—dictatorial rule through workers' and soldiers' councils—and resolved to work everywhere for the formation of such councils. Although it was not especially strong in terms of its members, it was still a notable factor in the given circumstances. In a tense situation even a small minority that has a determined will and a good dose of resolute force can have a significant effect. The mostly youthful *Spartakus* supporters are not short on these latter qualities, and since they were represented in various places of significance and now had a certain activity prescribed for them, which was supposed to be realised at once, one may not estimate as insubstantial their influence on the outbreak of the Revolution and the first pronouncements of the mobilised masses. Certainly, the Bolshevist doctrine is only Marxist in its language, but Blanquist in its character. Yet the Blanquist perspective is, as the author of this piece has already explained in 1899 in the work *The Preconditions of Socialism*, not wrong on all points. Under certain

preconditions, it is right for limited political purposes, and actions that are taken based on it hence also have some successes to show for it. Here, all the preconditions for such an action were present.

In Karl Liebknecht, whom the new government had freed from penal servitude on 21 October, to which the Reich Military Court [*Reichsmilitärgericht*] had sentenced him in 1916 for the same behaviour for which the now likewise freed Wilhelm Dittmann had only had imprisonment imposed a year later, the *Spartakus* League had a leader of extraordinary energy and working power. Rosa Luxemburg, who had similarly been freed from protective custody, also placed her services at his disposal. Monetary means, which were partly used to purchase weapons, flowed to them via the Berlin embassy of the Bolshevist government of Russia. In general, this embassy spent great sums of money to foster revolutionary propaganda in line with their views in Germany. Through its couriers in Russia, appeals and fliers printed in German, which called for revolution, were smuggled into Germany and sent to intermediaries for the purpose of distributing them to Spartacists and other revolutionary socialists. This fact came to light because on 4 November 1918 at the Anhalt Station in Berlin, a box belonging to one of these couriers who had just arrived, which was filled with such literature, fell to the ground and burst open with a jolt, whereby the contents appeared, among them fliers calling for assassinations and terrorism.

Since under the prevailing law of peoples [*Völkerrecht*], the privileges assured to ambassadors and their personnel—so-called extraterritoriality—has as its counter-condition the obligation to strictly refrain from any interference in the domestic affairs of the host country, the government took the now official observation of this contravention of that obligation, which had already been raised repeatedly in the bourgeois papers, as the occasion to break off diplomatic intercourse with the Bolshevist government. Ambassador Joffe and his staff were immediately handed their passes, so that they left Berlin on 6 November 1918. From Moscow, Joffe sometime later published statements in which he broadly admitted the behaviour he had been accused of, and extolled his own role in having contributed in this way to the victory of the Revolution that had broken out in Germany in the meantime. To this observation he added remarks that could be understood and were also interpreted as saying that leading members of Independent Social Democracy had received moneys from him for the same purposes, that is, for the conspiratorial organisation of the Revolution. Yet of that only so much was right that moneys, which

Emil Barth, who had become a *Volksbeauftragter* [People's Deputy] on 10 November, had received in mid-October in his capacity as a particularly active member of revolutionary groups of like-minded Germans to purchase weapons, in fact stemmed from Joffe, and that Barth had known this.[2] Joffe's claim, given a few days later, that on the evening before his departure from Germany, that is in the evening of 5 November 1918, he had given the member of Independent Social Democracy Oskar Cohn, who was the Reich *attaché* to the Russian embassy, 150,000 marks and 150,000 roubles to "further the Revolution", was unreservedly confirmed by the latter with the comment that he had "gladly accepted" the money in accordance with his conviction that parties of the Socialist International had to support one another, and "directed it toward its purpose, spreading the idea of Revolution", but that this had nothing to do with the sums given for purchasing weapons.[3] By contrast, regarding the chairman of Independent Social Democracy, Hugo Haase, whom Joffe named as someone who had also known about this, he could only prove that he had held political conversations with him and delivered to him political material for Reichstag speeches, which Haase was all the more in a position to admit since he had already publicly spoken about it.[4]

The party chairman of Independent Social Democracy published a statement on 10 December 1918 in the party's organ, whose decisive part reads as follows:

> The Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany had already resolved months ago, a long time before the Revolution, to reject moneys that could originate from Russian sources, since it consistently defended the view that means stemming from foreign states should not be placed in the service of party propaganda. The party then recently renewed this resolution yet again. We must most determinedly reject the insinuations of Herr Joffe, which can only serve to pose difficulties for the socialist movement in Germany, and prevent it from carrying out its goals.

With that, the matter was closed for the party itself and it was now only a matter for the persons named by Joffe to take a stance towards his claims.

Fundamentally, the following must be observed about this issue:

There is no codex of political customs that forbids a party from accepting support from a foreign sister party. How far it wants to go in doing so is left to its own sense of propriety. But reasons of the cleanliness of political life and the good international relations between peoples speak in

favour of limiting oneself in this to contributions for propaganda of ideas and supporting those who are being pursued, and, where compelling necessities do not speak against this, to do what one does openly. Just as Social Democracy decries the secret diplomacy and secret machinations, fomentings, and so on of the old system, so too it must require of itself publicity in its conduct and distance itself from conspiracies in other countries. The German Revolution came about without the weapons caches acquired with Russian money. These could, since one cannot keep such caches hidden for long, only mislead people to attempt an armed uprising already at a point in time where it would have ended in failure due to lacking the necessary mood among the mass of the people [*Volksmasse*]. The misuse of the exceptionality [*Ausnahmestellung*] of ambassadors and embassy staff under international law to finance and incite conspiracies in the host country is also to be condemned from a general point of view. Social Democracy has to develop the law of peoples, the international law [*internationale Gesetz*] for good relations of nations to one another, not backwards but forwards. Not to undermine trust and confidence [*Treu und Glauben*] between nations, but to make it its highest truth. It is one of the darkest chapters in the history of Bolshevism that decisive figures among its leaders unconcernedly flouted the most elementary fundamental principles of international customary law, when they thought they could further their purposes by doing so. Among others, Austria and Hungary have had to learn that, if one breaches certain parameters in these matters, there is ultimately no stopping contraventions against this trust and confidence any more, and what one at first only did to capitalist governments is now later practised against democratic and socialist governments as well if they do not act as desired. It has not been of use to the working class anywhere, it has only contributed to intensifying the corruption of morality and the disregard for human life internationally. On top of that, it is two different things whether a party grants another one means raised by its own members, or fleeces state coffers for this purpose.

In October and the first days of November 1918, the agitation of the *Spartakus* people in Germany had been able to show successes all the more as the press of the Majority socialists also adopted ever more revolutionary language. From the refusal of Wilson and the Entente to negotiate with a government led by Wilhelm II, it drew the political conclusions with commendable acuity. Some provincial papers, led by the *Fränkische Tagespost* in Nuremberg, which admittedly could move somewhat more freely at the time than *Vorwärts*, which appeared in the seat of military censorship,

made a start and demanded the deposal of Wilhelm II. Still this approach seemed so egregious that bourgeois papers, full of indignation, raised protests and demanded the intervention of the military authorities. These however had already forfeited their self-confidence and wavered, but in the Social-Democratic Party the calls multiplied and soon found an ally [*Mitstreiter*] in *Vorwärts*, which showed itself fully up to the task it had to perform. Hardly ever before had it shown the need of the moment for the German people so emphatically in lead articles of great political acuity and cogency as in those days. Its circulation then also rose in a short time to such a height that for a while it was the most-distributed paper in Berlin. Under the influence of its articles, it became clear to the broad mass of the people that the question now stood as follows: either the German people or Wilhelm II. The leaders of the military censorship became aware of this with consternation, and tried to save the Hohenzollern crown by banning any further treatment of this question in the press. Thereupon Ph. Scheidemann wrote the already-mentioned letter to the Reich Chancellor on 28 October 1918, in which he demanded the abdication of Wilhelm II as a member of the cabinet and in the name of the Social-Democratic Party itself; at the same time, he raised a protest against the intrusions of military censorship into the right of free expression of opinions and demanded redress. The Chancellor, who was bedridden at that moment, requested a few days' respite, because he initially wanted to discuss this question verbally with Wilhelm II—which it never ultimately came to, since the latter speedily disappeared to his headquarters.

Then the news of the movement among the troops of the *Marine* reached the Reich Chancellery. As recounted in the third chapter, on 4 November the government dispatched the Democratic Secretary of State Haußmann and the Social-Democratic representative Gustav Noske to Kiel to negotiate with the insurrectionists. But there these envoys could only observe the latter's victory, as their confidant [*Vertrauensmann*] Noske remains in Kiel and takes over the functions of governor. On 6 November, after longer consultation, the party committee and the Reichstag group of the Majority socialists, who had been summoned to Berlin, unanimously came to the following resolution:

> The party group and leadership demand that the armistice is carried out without any delay. The party group and party committee further demand amnesty for military misdemeanours and freedom from punishment for troops who have contravened discipline. They demand immediate

democratisation of the government as well as the administration of Prussia and the other federal states. The Reichstag group and the party committee charge the party leadership with informing the Reich Chancellor that the party group and committee decisively sanction and support the step undertaken by the party leadership in the Kaiser question, and demand a rapid settlement of this question.

These demands are conveyed to the government, and in the face of the indecision in the headquarters and the wavering of the Reich Chancellor this caused, the following ultimatum is delivered from the party leadership of the Majority socialists to him by Ph. Scheidemann on the following day, on 7 November at 5 o'clock in the afternoon:

The Social-Democratic Party demands:

1. That the bans on public assembly (which were ordered by the High Command) are lifted from today,
2. That police and military are kept to the utmost restraint,
3. That the Prussian government is immediately reformed in line with the Reichstag majority,
4. That the social-democratic influence on the Reich government is strengthened,
5. That the abdication of the Kaiser and the Crown Prince's relinquishing the throne are effected by midday on 8 November. If these demands are not fulfilled, Social Democracy will leave the government.

With the exception of the two conservative parties together with their followers, even the bourgeois parties recognised that Wilhelm II's resignation had become unavoidable, and they let the Reich Chancellor know this. He offers the Kaiser his dismissal, since he too considers the abdication necessary and cannot remain Chancellor if the Kaiser is of a different opinion. But he is made to stay in office for a few more days by the latter until he has made his decision, which would happen very shortly. Evidently, Wilhelm II and his people had received news about the events in the port cities, and first wanted to wait and see whether the flood would rise further or pass once again. In fact, they managed to move the leaders of the Majority socialists to postpone their exit from the government and the time limit of their ultimatum on account of the Kaiser's resignation and the Crown Prince's relinquishment for a few days by indicating that the conclusion of the armistice was just around the corner and could suffer a

delay through a change of government. An appeal by the party executive and the Reichstag group, dated 8 November, informs party comrades and the wider working class of this. It observes that some of the political demands put to the government were fulfilled, points to the inevitable delay in concluding an armistice, and then continues:

> That is why the party executive and the Reichstag party group have extended the deadline imposed until an armistice is concluded, to bring about an end to the bloodshed and securing the conclusion of peace.
>
> On Saturday morning, the workers' representatives will meet again.
>
> Workers! Party comrades! It is thus only a matter of a postponement by a few hours.
>
> Your strength and your determination will handle this postponement.
>
> The executive of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany and its Reichstag group.

But the flood was on the rise, and could not be halted by anything anymore, and the insurrection inched closer to the capital almost by the hour. In Munich and Braunschweig the Republic had even already been proclaimed. When on the evening of 8 November still no definite answer had been given by the headquarters, the social-democratic members of the government—besides Bauer and Scheidemann, Ed. David, August Müller, and Robert Schmidt had recently also been appointed to it—announced their exit, and the party leadership of the Majority socialists, which had stayed in close contact during this time with the Berlin functionaries of the party and other representatives of the working class, gathered these around itself even on the same evening to discuss the question of whether further waiting was still permissible. The answer came out as a no. It was resolved, if the abdication had not yet taken place on the morning of 9 November, to proclaim a general strike, for whose leadership a twelve-member committee was also immediately elected.

The leadership of Independent Social Democracy and the representatives of the *Spartakus* League also made provisions for mass uprisings. The latter had, as discussed above, weapons for whose purchase moneys had been passed onto them from the Bolshevist side, and which they had stored in seemingly suitable spots to use them as the case might be in battle against the armed forces of the old regime. However, in this they went their own ways, as the example of the Bolshevists seemed to require of them. Similarly, Independent Social Democracy reserved its own actions

for itself. Attempts to at least bring the two social-democratic factions together to a joint approach in the peace question had failed a short time beforehand.

These attempts had come in summer 1918 from the Berlin regional administration of the German Metalworkers' Association, and followed a political strike movement that had broken out at the end of January 1918 in Berlin as well as other places in Germany to bring about peace faster, but which was still able to be suppressed by the police with reinforcements from the military. To put a limit to the endless wranglings in the factories between the followers of the two social-democratic parties about the reasons for the failure of that strike movement, the regional administration resolved to approach the leadership of both parties about a new demonstration that would encompass the whole of the workers. On 13 July, they negotiated with the party executive of the Majority socialists, on 29 July with the party leadership of Independent Social Democracy. With both, they met with a fundamental readiness to participate in organising and leading a mass action for peace and the people's democratic rights, yet it proved impossible to bring the two parties together. When after quite a few pre-negotiations, on 29 August 1918 the same concrete question was posed to the executive of the Social-Democratic Party as had already previously (on 29 July) been presented to the party leadership of the Independents, of whether it would be prepared, as the case might be, to place itself at the head of such an action, it answered through its chairman Fritz Ebert:

> In the view of the party executive, something absolutely must happen this autumn to advance the peace question and the franchise question, yet all parliamentary means shall first be exhausted. So as not to make such an action illusory from the very start, it is absolutely necessary that these pre-negotiations are declared to be strictly confidential. So no fliers may go out, even ones without signatures. When the matter is ready, then an appeal must be directed to the masses of the people featuring names and adding their full titles.

The leadership of the Independents, to whom this decision had been conveyed by the members of the Metalworkers' Association who had been appointed to the task, Gustav *Heller* and Wilhelm *Siering*, answered on 18 September 1918 that, in its view,

only such bodies could take part in an armed action of this kind that wanted to pursue purely proletarian politics, i.e., one of ruthless class struggle to remove this system of government and bring about peace, and which confirmed this by fulfilling the following preconditions:

1. Rejecting war credits of all kinds.
2. Refusing to participate in a bloc with bourgeois parties,
3. Withdrawing members of political and trade-union organisations from government offices.

The Majority socialists declared that they could not agree to these conditions. New war credits would either be mere demobilisation credits or become necessary because the enemy were continuing the war and wanted to bring it onto German soil, even though Germany had completely accepted Wilson's conditions. The party had made the great sacrifice of allowing its members to enter government, in order to reach peace soon, since without Social Democracy such a peace could not be brought about.[5] At the time, there was no occasion for their withdrawal. The demands of the Independents could only be interpreted as meaning that they wanted to make these negotiations founder in all circumstances.

Independent Social Democracy answered this declaration once it had been conveyed to it on 26 October 1918 with a longer letter that bitterly criticised the entire policy of the Majority socialists and among other things declared the claim that the socialists' remaining in government was required in the interest of achieving peace was not valid. After receiving this letter, the Metalworkers' Commission resolved unanimously to regard its efforts as having failed. "The Commission regrets", its resolution closes, "that it did not succeed in bringing about a unification on the two questions that are so acutely important for the working class (peace and franchise reform), and hence sees its task as complete."

That is how the parties of Germany's socialist stood towards each other on the eve of the Revolution: full of mistrust and bitterness.

Notes

1. Philipp Scheidemann (1865–1939), German publicist and social-democratic politician, proclaimed the Weimar Republic at the start of the German Revolution, SPD member of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* tasked with financial policy November 1918–January 1919, Chancellor of Germany February–June 1919.

2. Emil Barth (1879–1941), German metalworker and anarcho-socialist politician, replaced Richard Müller in February 1918 as chairman of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, USPD member of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* responsible for social policy and primary go-between for the *Rat* and the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils November–December 1918.
3. Oskar Cohn (1869–1934), German social-democratic politician and Zionist, determined opponent of German imperialism, strong supporter of reconstituting Germany as a unitary rather than a federal state.
4. Hugo Haase (1863–1919), German social-democratic politician, jurist, and pacifist, USPD member of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* in charge of foreign affairs November–December 1918, sought to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Spartacist uprising along with Cohn and Karl Kautsky, assassinated by a mentally ill worker.
5. [Ed. B.—As Philipp Scheidemann relates in his work *The Collapse* (Berlin, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften), among others he, Otto Landsberg, and Fr. Stampfer had spoken strongly against entering into government in a party session of the Majority socialists, in which the question of entry had come to be decided, but had been outvoted, because in the party the opinion prevailed that the party had to make sacrifices for its country. (pp. 174/177.)]

Check for updates

CHAPTER 7

9 November 1918 in Berlin

Remember, remember, the fifth of November!

This cry, with which on 5 November children in England celebrate the anniversary of the discovery of the great Gunpowder Plot of 1605, can now receive its counterpart in Germany. A cry that would apply to a matter of quite another significance than the rescue of a king and his parliament from a politically hopeless attack of a small band of religious fanatics. For Germany, 9 November 1918 is the birthday of the democratic Republic, that means, of the self-government of its people.

Already the morning brought the decision. Late around midnight of 8 November, the Secretary of State Dr. Solf had still telephoned the chairman of the executive of the Majority socialists, Fritz Ebert, and volunteered to depart immediately for the headquarters in order to bring the Kaiser question to a decision. But the answer had come that he could save himself the trouble, it was already too late. The following morning would see the general strike.

And so it happened. Early in the morning of 9 November, at 8 o'clock, the executive of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (Majority socialists) and the Berlin representatives met once more to formulate the decisive resolution. It was a short discussion. Since a satisfactory statement had still not arrived from the headquarters, they agreed without much talk not to wait any longer, but to call up the workers without delay to a general

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strike, and to enter into contact with the party leadership of Independent Social Democracy. Emissaries hurried in all directions to make the resolution known in the factories. Until their morning break, in line with the instructions they had been issued, the workers had remained in the factories. Now, led by the great electricity plants and engineering works, they readily followed the slogan: "Out of the factories! Onto the streets!" Handbills had also been distributed in the plants and on the street on behalf of a revolutionary committee composed of Independent socialists and *Spartakus* people, which had its representatives in almost all the major factories in Berlin, with the following content:

> Workers, soldiers, comrades!
> The decisive hour is here! It is vital that we live up to our historical task.
> While on the coast the workers' and soldiers' councils have power in their hands, here arrests are made arbitrarily. Däumig and Liebknecht are arrested. That is the start of a military dictatorship, that is the prelude to useless butchery.
> We do not demand the abdication of one person, but a republic!
> A socialist republic with all its implications.
> Onwards to the fight for peace, freedom, and bread.
> Out of the factories!
> Out of the barracks!
> Join hands with each other.
> Long live the Republic.
> The Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.
> Barth, Brühl, Eckert, Franke, Haase, Ledebour, Liebknecht, Neuendorf, Pick, Wegmann.

From this side, they had already wanted to set the uprising in motion on 4 November, but then postponed the date by a few days, during which the police became aware of this plan and made various arrests, finally—on 8 November—that of E. Däumig.[1] On hearing the news of this, the representatives—the Revolutionary Stewards [*Revolutionäre Obleute*]—had met as swiftly as possible, had resolved not to waver any longer, and agreed the above appeal, whose style betrays the hurry in which it was drawn up.[2] In the given circumstances, it was naturally only likely to raise the readiness of the masses even further.

Enormous processions formed, which streamed towards the city centre with red flags and marched through the great thoroughfares. Berlin filled

with masses in the face of which even a government that was sure of its troops would have lost the will to resist.

But there were no such troops for Wilhelm II's government. The new supreme commander in the Marches, General von Linsingen, and the chief constable of the Berlin police had left no shortage of security measures of the most various kinds. The City Hall was strongly occupied by police. The General Post Office and Telegraph Office had a military garrison, the royal castle was closed off, machine guns were deployed in important spots, ample military had been mustered in the capital, while rail traffic from the North and Northwest, where the insurrection was victorious, had been completely stopped. But what did it help? Delegates from Social Democracy who travelled to the barracks to negotiate with the various regiments everywhere received the assurance that they would not fire on the people under any circumstances. Informed of this mood among the troops, the Reich Chancellor easily let himself be moved by a deputation dispatched to him to a decree that was published in a special issue of *Vorwärts* as follows:

> *There will be no shooting!*
> *The Reich Chancellor has ordered that no use be made of weapons on the part of the military.*

A further flier published by *Vorwärts* reads:

> *General strike!*
> The Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin has decided on a general strike. All factories stand still. The necessary provision for the population will be maintained. A great part of the garrison has placed itself at the disposal of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in closed bodies of troops with machine guns and artillery. The movement is jointly led by the Social-Democratic Party of Germany and the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany. Workers, soldiers, make sure that calm and order are maintained. Long live the social Republic!
> The Workers' and Soldiers' Council.

The flier was somewhat rushing ahead of the facts. The leadership of Independent Social Democracy had not met on the morning of 9 November, and could also not have been gathered. The deputation dispatched to the Reich Chancellor consisted of the Majority socialist deputies Fritz *Ebert*, Philipp *Scheidemann*, and Otto *Braun*, and the Majority

socialist members of the Committee of Twelve Fritz *Brolat* and Gustav *Heller*. It headed to the Reich Chancery, where the Chancellor and the remaining cabinet members were just in session, and were soon admitted. Ebert as the spokesman for the deputation revealed to those gentlemen that the working people now wanted to take its fate into its own hands. It knew it had the vast majority of the population behind it, and was determined to bring democracy to full realisation. Successful resistance by the government was out of the question, a great part of the garrison had already gone over to the people.

To the Chancellor's question to Ebert whether he believed he could guarantee the maintenance of order, he answered yes. The Chancellor then informed them that according to a telegram that had just arrived, the Kaiser had resigned, and following a short discussion, the cabinet members together likewise announced their resignation, and Max von Baden ceded his competencies as Reich Chancellor in all their forms to Fritz Ebert. This fact was announced by the latter to the public in the following words:

> Fellow citizens! The previous Reich Chancellor Prince Max von Baden has transferred to me the exercise of the affairs of the Reich Chancellor, with the approval of all the Secretaries of State. I am in the process of forming a new government in agreement with the parties, and will shortly report to the public about the outcome.
>
> The new government will be a people's government [*Volksregierung*]. It must endeavour to bring *peace* to the German people as quickly as possible, and to consolidate the *freedom* it has won.
>
> *Fellow citizens! I ask you all for your support* in the difficult work that awaits us. You know how seriously the war threatens the sustenance of the people, the first precondition of political life.
>
> The political revolution may not disturb the sustenance of the population. It must remain the first duty of all in the city and the countryside not to hinder but rather to foster the production and supply of foodstuffs.
>
> Need for food means plundering and robbery with misery for all. The poorest would suffer the worst, and industrial workers be affected the most bitterly.
>
> Whoever misappropriates food or other necessary things or the means of transport required for their distribution sins in the gravest way against the collectivity [*Gesamtheit*].
>
> Fellow citizens! I ask you all urgently, leave the streets, care for calm and order!
>
> Berlin, 9 November 1918.
>
> Reich Chancellor Ebert.

So far as Wilhelm II came into consideration as a personality with his own will [*wollende Persönlichkeit*], the news about his resignation was a quiet anticipation of coming events. In fact, he had not yet decided on anything, but rather still sought after possibilities of saving the crown for himself and his dynasty. In the recognition that longer hesitation could only worsen the situation, Max von Baden had construed a telegram that contained a partial assent as a full one. As his decree implies, he hoped in this way to save the crown, if not for Wilhelm *père* and *fils*, then still perhaps for another member of the Hohenzollern family. That was, however, a waste of time and effort.

From the deputation of the Majority socialists, Scheidemann and Otto Braun hurried back to the Reichstag. The others were precisely at the point of leaving the Reich Chancery building when they ran into the deputies of Independent Social Democracy Oskar *Cohn*, W. *Dittmann* and Ewald *Vogtherr*, who had just entered it. They informed them about what had happened, and Ebert proposed to them that a cabinet be formed composed in equal parts of Majorityists and Independents, to which members of the bourgeois parties of the left could lend their support as expert ministers [*Fachminister*]; Germany should be proclaimed as a Republic with a far-reaching socialist programme, and the goal of constructing a socialist republic. The named deputies declared themselves fundamentally in agreement with that, but added that they had no authorisation to make an arrangement that was binding for their party, but rather had to leave this to its central executive. For this, they proposed a period of thinking time until four o'clock in the afternoon, to which the others willingly assented.

The offer by Ebert and his colleagues has a claim to a just appraisal. When it was made, the Majority socialists not only had the overwhelming majority of the socialist workers in the country behind them, but even in Berlin they were still assured the support of the majority of the socialist proletariat. In that light, it was a proof of great insight into the requirements of the moment and an example of conciliatory accommodation that they distanced themselves without further ado from any thought of distributing the cabinet positions according to the relative strengths of the socialist parties' Reichstag presences or their number of members, and offered their organisationally still much weaker socialist rival the same number of members of the government that they claimed for their own party. They also refrained from any attempt to place any conditions on it regarding its choice of representatives. To Oskar Cohn's question: "What do you think

about the entry of socialists who lie even further left into the cabinet? I want to speak quite openly: what do you think about Karl Liebknecht entering it?", Ebert answered: "Please, bring us Karl Liebknecht, it would be our pleasure. We do not make the formation of the government dependent on questions of personalities [*Personenfragen*]." Despite this, their offer in no way met with unanimous acceptance among the leadership of Independent Social Democracy.

In the meantime, afternoon approached. On the square before the Reichstag, enormous processions of workers and soldiers had taken up positions, joined by a no less numerous mixed audience, waving red flags and placards on which stood the words "Peace! Freedom! Bread!", an immeasurable singing and shouting multitude of people. Before them, Philipp Scheidemann steps up to the window of the Reichstag, gives a sign that lets calm fall, then proclaims:

> Fellow citizens! Workers! Comrades!
>
> The monarchic system has collapsed. A great part of the garrison has joined us. The Hohenzollern have abdicated. Long live the great German Republic! Fritz Ebert is forming a new government, to which all social-democratic tendencies belong. The military commander-in-chief will have the social-democratic deputy *Göhre* as an *attaché*, who will co-sign his ordinances; now our task consists of not letting the complete victory of the people be sullied, and therefore I ask you to ensure that no disturbance of security takes place. Take care that the Republic that we are creating is not disturbed from any side. Long live the free German Republic!

After tumultuous shouts of approval had already interrupted his proclamation at various points in his address, his final cry unleashed roaring cheers that repeated again and again, which were followed by renewed singing of socialist songs.

In the Reichstag itself, the two social-democratic factions now held extraordinary discussions to take a stance towards the proposal of forming a cabinet on the principle of parity, and if yes to determine their representatives in it. The large Majority faction did not take a long time for that. It declared itself in agreement with the proposal without hesitation, and named as its representatives in the cabinet the two party chairmen, Fritz *Ebert* and Philipp *Scheidemann*, who had come from the working class, the one as a leatherworker, the other as a typesetter, and Otto *Landsberg*, who was highly valued as a jurist. All three of them members of Social Democracy for decades.

Things did not go so simply in the leadership of Independent Social Democracy, which, executive and Reichstag party group, had gathered in the latter's conference room. Here even the mere idea of a collaboration with the persons selected by the Majority socialists met with the passionate opposition of a part of the leading party representatives, whose most energetic speaker was Georg *Ledebour*.[3] According to him and those who thought the same as him, the leaders of the Majorityists, the Eberts, Scheidemanns, Landsbergs, and their colleagues, were traitors to socialism, with whom one could under no circumstances form a government. These people had to be rejected from the very start. That would in effect have meant rejecting collaboration with the Majorityists overall. For the party of the Independents could all the less make them prescriptions about their choice of representatives given that precisely their spokesmen had consistently and in the sharpest terms taken the point of view that their party could under no circumstances allow outsiders to meddle in their choice when dispatching members into a mixed commission. The Majorityists would also hardly have put up with the rejection of their most recognised leaders. A part of the Independents therefore defended the view that the fundamental principle of the parties' right of self-determination in regard to the selection of their representatives had to be adhered to, and only the fundamental aspects of cabinet formation had to form the object of the negotiation. The debate about this took up a lot of time, so that emissaries from the Majorityists, who were supposed to enquire whether they had reached a decision, repeatedly had to retreat empty-handed. However, the discussion ended with a victory for the latter view. As they were moving on to discussing the fundamental political principle of the new Republic, Karl Liebknecht, who had entered the room shortly beforehand with some of his followers, took the floor and dictated to the secretary of the party almost in a tone of command: "All executive, all legislative, all judicial power to the workers' and soldiers' councils." That afternoon, he had, at the head of his retinue, let the red flag be hoisted on the Berlin *Schloss*, and held a revolutionary address from a window of the *Schloss* to the multitude gathered below him, crowded together shoulder to shoulder, which met with jubilant approval and prompted endless cheers. Now at first a strange pause followed his words. Nobody seemed to agree with him unreservedly, nobody wanted to engage in a debate with him.[4] This had not yet been resumed again when Philipp Scheidemann, the main spokesman of the Majorityists, who were growing ever more impatient because of the long wait, came into the Independents' party room himself,

accompanied by Brolat and Heller, and directed the question at them, half reproachfully: "Have you finally come to a decision now?" They said to him it was still a matter of the fundamental conditions of collaboration. To the further question of whether there was a proposal, he was handed the minute of Liebknecht's dictation. He looked at it for a long time, and then said in an almost fatherly tone: "Yes, but folks, how do you imagine that?" Liebknecht answers abruptly that it must be, and a discussion unfolded between him and the Independent workers Emil Barth and Richard Müller, who belonged to the left of the party, on the one hand, and Scheidemann, Brolat, and Heller on the other. From the fact that the more moderate members of Independent Social Democracy stayed silent, the Majorityists concluded that the party had deliberately pushed forward their left wing for the negotiation so as to take the pressure off the right. So, among others, Friedrich Stampfer in his memoir *9th November* (Berlin, Buchhandlung Vorwärts). But that is, as one sees, thoroughly mistaken. The moderate members of the party were silent because they could not endorse Liebknecht, but also did not want to oppose him in front of others before the party leadership had not reached a definite stance by itself.

With what message Scheidemann and his companions ultimately returned to the Majority faction one can see from the answer that its party executive sent to it around half past 8 o'clock in the evening to the executive of Independent Social Democracy. It reads:

> Guided by the sincere wish to reach an agreement, we must clarify our fundamental stance towards your demands.
>
> They demand:
>
> 1. Germany shall be a *social Republic*. This demand is the aim of our own policy, but the *people* has to decide about this through the constitutive assembly.
> 2. In this Republic, the *entire executive, legislative, and juridical power* must be exclusively in the hands of elected representatives of the entire working population and soldiers.
>
>   If by this demand is meant the dictatorship of part of one class, behind which the majority of the people does not stand, we must *reject this demand*, because it contradicts our democratic fundamental principles.
> 3. Exclusion of all *bourgeois* members from the government.
>
>   We must *reject* this demand, because fulfilling it would considerably endanger the *sustenance of the people* [*Volksernährung*], if not make it impossible.

4. The participation of the Independents only counts as a provisional measure *for three days*, in order to form a government capable of concluding an armistice. We consider a cooperation by the socialist tendencies to be required at least until the constituent assembly meets.
5. The *ministers with portfolios* [*Ressortminister*] only count as technical aides for the actual and decisive cabinet. We agree to this demand.
6. Equality for both leaders of the cabinet. We are for the equality of all cabinet members, but the constitutive assembly has to decide about this.

Since the chairman of the Independents' executive and party Hugo Haase, who had been dispatched to Kiel and was on his way back, had not yet arrived back in Berlin, but the party leadership did not wish to take such an important decision without him, answering this letter had to be deferred to the next day. While all this was taking place in the conference rooms, outside and in the other rooms of the Reichstag was still surging the life of a Revolution that found itself in the state of its first manifestations of life. Important public buildings, among them the Post Office and Telegraph Office, were occupied by socialists, others taken under guard. In various places in the capital it also came to shootings, the most serious of them in the environs of imperial palaces. From the upper floor of the *Marstall* [Royal Stables], which lies opposite the East side of the Berlin *Schloss*, shots were suddenly fired around 6 o'clock into the passing crowd, and took their toll. Soldiers and civilians armed with machine guns forced their entry after short but heavy fighting, in which there were several dead, but on advancing could find no garrison. It must have fled out of some unknown exit. There were still more dead when shots were fired at passers-by from the building of the former Royal Library and the University building, the one beside, the other across from the Palais on the Opernplatz, which subsequently developed into a bitter fight between besiegers and occupiers. How much political fanaticism and how much nervous overexcitement or misunderstood assignments had to do with these and other occurrences of the same kind has remained unsolved. There was no question of any resistance organised on the part of the military. The military commanders who stayed in Berlin followed the instruction issued by the former Reich Chancellor, and allowed even the commandant building and the building of the police headquarters to be occupied by socialists.

It was the best thing they could do. After all, the troops of the Berlin garrison had placed themselves unconditionally on the side of the Revolution. Foremost among them the Kaiser-Alexander-regiment and the fourth regiment of Jäger, which were housed in the same barracks at

whose inauguration on 28 March 1901 Wilhelm II had held the speech in which he said to the soldiers:

> Like a mighty fortress, your new barracks rises up in the highest proximity to the *Schloss*. The Kaiser-Alexander-regiment is called on to be prepared, like a personal guard [*Leibwache*], after a fashion, by day or by night to put their life and blood on the line for the King and his house, if they have to. And if ever a time like that one (reference to 18 March 1848) should come again in this city, a time of insolent insurrection against the King, then, I am convinced, the Alexander-regiment will put to flight all insubordination and impropriety against its royal master with the bayonet.

The "fortress" was still there, but its garrison did not consider it their task to act as a personal guard against the people. Fairly late in the evening, around half past 9 o'clock, the elected workers' and soldiers' councils came together for their first great session in the great assembly chamber of the Reichstag. It is opened with a fiery address by Emil *Barth*, who is elected as its chairman, which celebrates the victorious insurrection of the Berlin proletariat, and expresses recognition and thanks to the Berlin garrison for having placed themselves on the side of the people and through their behaviour assured the Revolution an almost bloodless victory. It is resolved to carry out proper elections on the following day at 10 o'clock in the morning in all the factories of Berlin for the workers' council, and in all barracks and military hospitals for the soldiers' council. For every 1000 male and female workers one member of the workers' council should be elected, and for every battalion or equivalent formation one member of the soldiers' council, and those elected should gather in the afternoon for the purpose of electing the provisional government.

Apart from the appeal reproduced above, the provisional workers' and soldiers' council, which was permanently gathered in one of the committee rooms of the Reichstag, issued the following appeal:

> Citizens! Workers!
>
> To effectively carry through the revolutionary movement, *order* and *calm* are necessary.
>
> The population is urgently asked *to refrain from forming crowds in the streets*, and to avoid the street after darkness has set in.
>
> The magistrates of Greater Berlin work in conjunction with the workers' and soldiers' council.

The Greater Berlin constabulary has placed itself in the service of the people.

Cars with provisions and urban cars may not be stopped.

The food supply to Greater Berlin may not be disturbed. The food stores and food voucher distribution centres are under the protection of the people. All non-commercial facilities, like *gas*, *water*, *and electricity plants*, *savings banks* and other public banks, as well as means of transport, are likewise placed under the protection of the people.

The *people's committee* [*Volksausschuss*] for protecting the non-commercial facilities of Greater Berlin will protect these facilities through commissaries. The protected facilities will be made recognisable with placards.

The commissaries are provided with *red armbands* with the imprint "People's Committee". Apart from that, they carry legitimation cards. They are supported in their activity by representatives of the workers' and soldiers' council.

The citizenry is asked to support the commissaries of the people's committee in their activity.

Berlin, 9 November 1918.

Authorised agent of the Reich Chancellor and the Minister of the Interior
Paul *Hirsch.*
The People's Committee
Eugen *Ernst. Sassenbach. Leid.*
The Soldiers' Council
Baumann, Gelberg, Hertel.
Trade Union Committee for Berlin and Surrounds
Körsten.

Apart from that, the following announcement appeared in the issue of *Vorwärts* of 10 November 1918:

Essential enterprises may not strike.

A number of trades yesterday joined the general strike who may not strike if by doing so they are not to endanger the entire existence of the Berlin population in the most serious way possible. To prevent a continuation of this situation, which would lead to the heaviest grievances and summon up a catastrophe, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council has issued the following provisions, which are hereby brought to the awareness of the working class.

The following may not strike:

1. Trade, traffic, and transport industries (in particular all coachmen and drivers of haulage, storehouses, foodstuffs, and coal).
2. *Food provisions and semiluxury food branches* (in particular butchers, bakers, brewers, restaurant businesses, except for cafés).

3. *Vitally important state and communal enterprises* (in particular gas, water, electricity, canalisation, street-cleaning, waste disposal, and similar).
4. *Domestic and care personnel* (also domestic personnel) of the hospitals, care homes, and sanatoriums.

The Workers' and Soldiers' Council.

After this, the following advert was inserted in bold letters into the *Vorwärts* of 10 November 1918:

We are looking for organisers!

Persons who are in a position to take on *the oversight of non-commercial and urban enterprises* of all kinds are urgently sought.

Whoever is prepared to do this may report to the bureau of his organisation.

The Workers' and Soldiers' Council.

The same purpose as this insertion was served by the subsequent appeal, which was likewise published in *Vorwärts* on 10 November 1918:

Workers! Fellow citizens!

The undersigned have together joined a "People's Committee" for the protection of the non-commercial enterprises of Greater Berlin, at the behest of their organisations and in agreement with the city administration. The commission will let the non-commercial institutions who must protect their activity in the interest of the people be guarded by commissaries.

Such facilities are, among others,
storage places for food stores,
food voucher distribution spots,
public soup kitchens,
gas, water, and electricity plants,
savings banks and other public banks,
means of transport.

These facilities are to be secured in all cases. The population is asked to support those appointed as our commissaries in the execution of their security measures. The military has withdrawn from urban enterprises in the confidence that the people will protect its property.

For the Association of Social-Democratic Voters' Associations in Berlin and its Surrounds.

Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany:
Karl *Leid*. Dr. Kurt *Rosenfeld*. Mathilde *Wurm*.

For the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, district of Greater Berlin:
Eugen *Ernst*. Theodor *Fischer*. Hugo *Pötzsch*.
For the Trade Union Commission of Berlin and Surrounds:
Alwin *Körsten*. Eugen *Brückner*. Hermann *Mietz*. Ernst *Schulze*. Ludwig *Hodagg*.
For the Association of German Trade Unions Hirsch-Duncker (Berlin and Surrounds):
Franz *Neustedt*. Ed. *Jordan*
For the Cartel of Christian Trade Unions:
Tränert.
For the Berlin city administration:
Wermuth, magistrate.

From all these announcements one can see how much on the day of the Revolution the old social-democratic spirit prevailed among the working class of Berlin, with which the founders of the German socialist workers' movement had inoculated it; how much the victorious working class and its representatives were anxious to preserve the Revolution's character as a decidedly civilised movement even in the tumultuous class struggle; how much they were carried by the thought that, even in the Revolution, the greatest consideration must be taken of the well-being, safety, and rights of non-combatants; and that the Revolution, in paving the way for new law, must keep itself clean of concessions to the spectres of wild disorder and a capriciousness that gives expression to a lower instinct.

Notes

1. Ernst Däumig (1866–1922), German journalist and socialist politician, strong supporter of council democracy and the October 1917 Russian Revolution, close ally of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards but opposed the Spartacist uprising, led the USPD left wing into unification with the KPD in 1920.
2. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards (*Revolutionäre Obleute*) were freely-elected representatives of the workers of various German industries, independent of the trade union movement. Founded during the anti-war strike of January 1918, they opposed the Wilhelmine regime's war conduct, and advocated the reconstitution of Germany as a council republic during the Revolution. Losing momentum after the defeat of the Spartacist uprising, which they helped to instigate, and the crushing of the Bremen and Bavarian Soviet Republics in 1919, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards faded into insignificance by 1920.

3. Georg Ledebour (1850–1947), German journalist, anti-militarist, and socialist politician, member of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, member of the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, refused to work with the SPD as a USPD member of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*.
4. [Ed. B.—The author of this work here cannot suppress a personal remark. Up to this point I had had, despite far-reaching differences of opinion between us, much sympathy for Karl Liebknecht. But when he set about dictating the Bolshevist system to the party in the way I have described, one thought flashed through my mind like lightning: "He will bring us the counter-revolution."]

Check for updates

CHAPTER 8

The Initial Form of the German Republic

There is no better witness for the overwhelming impression of the uprising of 9 November 1918 in Berlin than the lead articles of the Berlin newspapers on 10 November. Even the organs of the extreme right did not dare to wholeheartedly deny its political importance for reshaping Germany, but limited themselves to distorting the facts and expressing several reservations.

Thus, the strictly conservative *Kreuzzeitung* wrote with resignation:

> All elements of the people who want to preserve the state and social order will have to join forces altogether to prevent chaos, if possible.

Which state and which social order it meant, the paper thought it wise to leave undetermined, and consoled its sympathisers with an instruction for the future:

> Conservatives must sow the seed from which one day will spring a better lot for the coming generations of the German people, than has been allotted to us and our children.

The agrarian-conservative *Deutsche Tageszeitung* declared itself content with the proposal to undertake elections for a constitutive German national assembly as quickly as possible. It wrote:

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M. S. Ostrowski, *Eduard Bernstein on the German Revolution*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27719-2_8

> Governmental power can in the long run only be wielded by a government that has received its mandate from the majority will of the German people, ascertained faultlessly and in an orderly way.

With that, the doctrine of divine right was fundamentally already abandoned.

The nationalist *Tägliche Rundschau*, in its joy that the Revolution had kept itself so free from violent excesses, bore testament that it was wrong to call the rule of workers' and soldiers' councils Bolshevist, as had been customary hitherto. They had made an honest effort to maintain order and discipline; and so, "Ebert's injunction to collaborate with those of different opinions to protect the people from civil war, famine, and anarchy should be followed."

The organs of the Progressive People's Party, on the left of bourgeois democracy, and the Catholic *Zentrum* expressed their joy about the course of the Revolution, which on the whole was so untarnished, and likewise advocated calling a constitutive national assembly soon.

Three papers had apparently changed their character overnight. The sole infraction against private rights that had been committed on 9 November concerned some press organs in the capital and were not without a certain humorous aspect. What should have become on the day of the Revolution of the newspapers that up to then had been the semi-official mouthpieces of the deposed government? They could not appear in this capacity any more. But, even if their editors wanted this, they also could not present themselves as semi-official mouthpieces for the new government, since that had not yet even come about at all, and they did not yet know exactly what this would now look like. And so, a number of socialists used the situation that the Republic was clearly here, but had not yet found its form, to temporarily take them over, some the hitherto ultra-official [*oberoffiziös*] *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, others—socialists of a Spartacist tendency—the more occasionally-official [*gelegenheitsoffiziös*] *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*. The subscribers of the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine* received on 10 November 1918 their paper with the title

> DIE INTERNATIONALE
> previously: *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*

along with social-democratic content. The lead article, entitled "To work!", celebrates the completed transformation as one "of such great force and sig-

nificance that we cannot yet measure its effects at all", and ends with the passage:

> **We hail freedom, we hail the socialist Republic of Germany with a cry that is a vow:**
> **Up the Republic!**
> **Up the International!**

Without changing its title, the *Berliner Allgemeine Zeitung*, published by the Ullstein Verlag, a paper that was designed for those elements who could spend only very modest amounts on newspapers, especially in the little localities surrounding Berlin, received an explicit social-democratic content, whereas the *Berliner Morgenpost* from the same publisher, which had perhaps three times the circulation, and the *Vossische Zeitung*, the organ of liberal intellectuals and certain trade circles in Berlin, which had changed over to it, were left alone. Likewise the very well-distributed organs of the Mosse Verlag, *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Berliner Volkszeitung.*

Quite otherwise the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, published by the Scherl Verlag.

Already on 9 November, late in the evening, there appeared an issue of this paper under the title:

> DIE ROTE FAHNE
> *formerly Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger—2nd evening edition*

It bore at the start of its text the following notification:

> The editorial office of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* has been occupied by representatives of the revolutionary people (*Spartakus* Group). Editorial leadership has thereby changed over to the leaders of our comrades.

However, the content was in general kept in the paper's usual tone, so that one can see that the great part was already typeset when the *Spartakus* people took control of it. Only a line printed in large letters across the front page, "*Berlin under the red flag*", a somewhat smaller line below it, "Police headquarters stormed—650 prisoners freed—Red flags on the *Schloss*", and a number of reports about the events in Berlin betray through their tone its alignment with the Revolution, but without demonstratively expressing the particular tendency of the *Spartakus* group. From the

report about the storming of the police headquarters, the first paragraph is important. It read:

> In the hours of the afternoon, armed troops in cars moved in processions through the city. In the vicinity of the Hallesches Ufer, guns were distributed from a
>
> *secret weapons depot*,
>
> and then began the circuit, which was hands-down well-organised.

That is a reference to one of the weapons stores to whose creation the Bolshevists had contributed money.

The morning edition of the paper of 10 November 1918 expresses this specific tendency significantly more clearly. It bore the same title *Rote Fahne*, and has at the start of its text the following announcement:

> *Please note:*
>
> The previous *Lokal-Anzeiger* was only taken over by us late in the evening, so that we had to include a series of already-typeset notices to fill the paper, which as a result were not presented in the form in which we intend to portray matters and events. This will change from tomorrow onwards.
>
> The editors of the *Rote Fahne*.
>
> Organ of the *Spartakus* tendency.

If the appropriation of the bourgeois paper was here held out as a permanent prospect, then the text of the paper contains, besides notices and appeals that express the unity of the socialist working class in their struggle, also some that already augured their war on the new social-democratic government. To Ebert's appeal—printed in simple brevier type—which urgently warns people "to refrain from anything that could endanger the supplies necessary for the sustenance of the population, to leave the streets and to care for calm and order", the following note was added in larger lettering and in bold:

> On the contrary, we call on people *not* to leave the streets, but to stay armed and to be on guard at every moment. The cause of the Revolution is only safe in the hands of the people. The call by the Reich Chancellor, newly minted by the toppled Kaiser, only has the purpose of sending the masses home to restore the old "order". Workers, soldiers, stay on your guard!

An appeal entitled "To workers and soldiers" calls on these to "*complete work*" and to mistrust those "who believe they may steer your fate from

the positions of Reich Chancellor and minister". To achieve the goal of the workers it was necessary that the Berlin proletariat in the blue and grey declare that it would pursue the following demands with determination and untameable will to fight:

1. *Disarming the entire police*, all officers as well as soldiers, who do not stand on the side of the new order; arming the people; all soldiers and proletarians who are armed keep their weapons.
2. Takeover of all military and civilian administrative bodies and command centres by representatives of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.
3. Handover of all weapons and munitions stocks as well as all armaments factories to the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.
4. Control of all means of transport by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.
5. Abolishing military courts; replacement of military blind obedience with soldiers' voluntary discipline under the control of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.
6. Removal of the Reichstag and all parliaments as well as the existing Reich government; takeover of the government by the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council until the institution of a Reich Workers' and Soldiers' Council.
7. Election of workers' and soldiers' councils across all of Germany, in whose hand exclusively legislation and administration lies. The entire adult working people may proceed to vote for workers' and soldiers' councils, in the city and countryside and without difference of sex.
8. Abolition of all dynasties and individual states; our slogan reads: the unitary Socialist Republic of Germany.
9. Immediate uptake of association with all the existing workers' and soldiers' councils in Germany and the socialist sister parties abroad.
10. Immediate recall of the Russian embassy to Berlin.

Apart from some demands that were shared by all social democrats, this is the specific political programme of Russian Bolshevism. A model for motions by the *Spartakus* group that were to be tabled in all the assemblies of enterprises, soldiers' councils, etc., demands the "prompt restoration of German relations to the Russian Soviet Republic, the victorious advance guard of the world revolution", and that "besides the other

truest and bravest comrades, comrade Rosa Luxemburg be dispatched to the presidium of the Central Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Germany or another body to be established of this grade".

Then it continues:

> Workers and soldiers! A thousand-year-long servitude is coming to an end; out of the unspeakable sufferings of war arises a new freedom. Four long years the *Scheidemänner*, the government socialists [*Regierungssozialisten*], have chased you through the horrors of war, have told you we had to defend "the Fatherland", where it was only about the naked predatory interests of imperialism. Now, when German imperialism is collapsing, they seek to save what can still be saved for the bourgeoisie, and seek to suffocate the revolutionary energy of the masses.
>
> No "*Scheidemann*" may sit in government anymore; no socialist may enter government *so long as a government socialist still sits in it*. There is no commonality with those who have betrayed you for four years.
>
> Down with capitalism and its agents!
>
> Long live the Revolution!
>
> Long live the International!

With that, not only the factual but also the *personal* struggle was carried into the movement: the condemnation of people whose policy during the war one could portray as mistaken, but whose motivations had nothing in common with imperialist tendencies, and in whom the great majority of the socialist workers of Germany saw their appointed leaders.

This challenge was accompanied by the following "Greeting to the Russian Soviet Republic":

> The *Rote Fahne* (organ of the *Spartakus* tendency) sends its first and warmest greeting to the Federal Socialist Soviet Republic and asks it to announce to our Russian brothers that the Berlin workers have celebrated the first anniversary of the Russian Revolution by accomplishing the German Revolution.

So the organ of the *Spartakus* group, led by Karl Liebknecht. A quite different tone was struck by *Vorwärts* in its edition of 10 November 1918. Its lead article celebrating the victory of the Revolution carried the heading "*No civil war!*". It mentions that already on the day before, attempts had been made "by individual small groups, often under unknown and irresponsible leadership", to frustrate the work of the Workers' and

Soldiers' Council. But that was "the gravest sin against the working class that could ever be thought of". The work that is being carried out by the great mass of the workers could not be disturbed by small minorities. It continues *verbatim*:

> Yesterday's victory by the people over the old system was only paid with scant blood sacrifices. Should the world after such a marvellous triumph now be granted the spectacle of the working class tearing itself apart in a senseless civil war? *That can never happen again.*

In a series of federal states, especially in Bavaria, the article continues, the old party and the Independents had joined together on the day of the Revolution, there was no division there anymore. Should Berlin lag behind them? Unification must be carried through here as well, it was a matter of *the welfare and future of the entire working class.* The work of reconciliation "may not founder at some embittered people whose character is not strong enough to overcome all rancour and let it be forgotten". Such rancour was far from the masses' minds, yesterday workers and workers established unity almost instinctively. And the organ of the Social-Democratic Party continues:

> No leader may obstruct this. If there are some among them with whom unification cannot be made, *then it must be made without them. Work of such enormous significance cannot fail at any question of personality.*
>
> The old Social-Democratic Party aspires to this unification with all its might even *given its own sacrifices.* It knows that in this endeavour it is as one with the healthy good sense of the working class … *the hand of brotherhood lies open—accept it!*

How far such language expressed the sentiments of the great majority of the workers of Berlin at that time the course of the following days showed.

On the morning of 10 November, the party group and leadership of Independent Social Democracy met to deliberate about their stance towards the answer from the party leadership of the Majority socialists detailed in the previous chapter. Hugo *Haase*, who had returned from Hamburg the previous evening, had the chair. Against a minority who under no circumstances wanted anything to do with any government that included men like Philipp Scheidemann, it was resolved after lively debate not to reject entering a cabinet composed of representatives of both par-

ties, but rather only to make it conditional on certain conditions, which were formulated as follows:

> The Independent Social-Democratic Party is ready to enter the cabinet in order to consolidate our revolutionary socialist achievements under the following conditions:
>
> The cabinet may only consist of social democrats who sit equally [*gleichberechtigt*] alongside one another as commissaries of the people [*Volkskommissare*]. For expert ministers this restriction does not apply; they are only technical aides for the decisive cabinet. Each of them will be given two members of the social-democratic parties with equal rights to be by their side, one from each party.
>
> No time limit will be attached to the entry of the Independent social democrats into the cabinet, into which each party will depute three members.
>
> Political power lies in the hands of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, who are shortly to be called together for a full assembly from the whole Reich.
>
> The question of the constitutive assembly will only become relevant after the conditions that have been brought about by the Revolution have become consolidated, and shall therefore be left to later discussions.
>
> In case these conditions are accepted, which are dictated by the wish for the proletariat to manifest a unified appearance, we have delegated our members Haase, Dittmann, and Barth to the cabinet.

Hugo *Haase* and Wilhelm *Dittmann* belonged to the leadership of Independent Social Democracy, and were widely known as Reichstag deputies for this party, and Emil *Barth*, a metalworker by profession, was a member of the *Spartakus* group and had been proposed on its behalf after Karl Liebknecht had bluntly declined the invitation to enter the cabinet as a member of the radical left.

The conditions were conveyed to the leadership of the Social-Democratic Party, and after short deliberation it declared itself prepared to agree to them. This was justified with reference to their interest in the unity of the proletarian movement and Germany's straitened situation. After all, in the interim the heavy conditions had become known on which the Entente powers had made their approval of an armistice dependent, which meant nothing other than a complete capitulation. These had also been decisive for the leadership of Independent Social Democracy not even considering the suggestion of taking over government alone if possible.

To give the pact between the two parties peremptory force still required the consent of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in the capital.

And this it did not fail to give. Over the course of the morning, the workers in their factories and the soldiers in their barracks conducted elections for their councils in accordance with the provisions that had been laid down for them, and in the afternoon at 5 o'clock these councils themselves met for a full assembly in the large Busch Circus.

It was a mighty rally, and it proceeded in a very boisterous way. Still that morning, the *Spartakus* people had distributed a flier that in light of the state of affairs could only have had an incendiary effect, but at the same time also showed a curious misjudgment of the mood of the overwhelming majority of the social-democratically-minded workers of Berlin. It first declares that they, the socialists of the *Spartakus* tendency, had "in the first place and throughout the entire war defended the idea of immediate revolutionary struggle against the war", and then gives the workers' and soldiers' councils the following line for the election of the provisional government:

> Not a single vote may be cast for a government socialist. They have betrayed the Revolution for four years and will continue to do so.
>
> Not a single vote may be cast for a socialist who is prepared to enter government together with bourgeois or government socialists. Party comrades! The bourgeois and government socialists want to have you in government so that you help them cover up their sins. You are too good for that. They may resign for good, or they may themselves bear the consequences of their criminal war policy.

So not only should no member of the larger Social-Democratic Party receive a single vote, but also no member of Independent Social Democracy who was ready for an understanding with it. The strife within the socialist camp should be carried on in perpetuity.

How little that conformed to the thinking that animated the gathered representatives of the workers and soldiers soon showed itself after the opening of proceedings. Three thousand persons, half of them delegates from the workers, half representatives of the soldiers, elected Emil Barth, after a short address with which he opened the assembly, as well as the metalworker Richard *Müller*, who belonged to Independent Social Democracy, and First Lieutenant Walz as chairs, and Brutus *Molkenbuhr*, a member of the Social-Democratic Party, as secretary. Then, one after

another, Fritz *Ebert* from the Social-Democratic Party, Hugo *Haase* from Independent Social Democracy, and Karl *Liebknecht* from the *Spartakus* League held speeches about the significance of the Revolution. All of them were greeted with enthusiastic cheers, and their speeches all earned great applause. But as tumultuous as these attestations of approval were, they were still only united so far as they applied to remarks about the meaning and the tasks of the Revolution, and were eclipsed by the never-ending vehement jubilation unleashed by the announcement, delivered by Ebert, that agreement had been achieved between the two social-democratic parties about forming a joint government on the basis of a cabinet to be composed of three members of each of the two parties. It was a spontaneous answer by the overwhelming majority of the assembly to the attempts by the *Spartakus* people to undo the work of reconciliation.

With this intent in mind, a list had been compiled by the latter for the election of an action committee for the Workers' and Soldiers' Council that did not contain the name of a single member of the Social-Democratic Party, but only those of followers of their tendency and of members of the left wing of Independent Social Democracy. When they moved on to discussing the election, the reading-out of this list provoked the most vigorous opposition and signs of great unwillingness. In particular, the soldiers' representatives insisted unanimously on a composition of the committee according to the principle of parity. The list proposed by members of the Social-Democratic Party, which was read out by its member Franz *Büschel*, conformed to this demand, as did the eventual vote itself. For the Social-Democratic Party, its members Franz *Büschel*, Gustav *Heller*, *Hiob*, Ernst *Jülich*, *Maynz*, and Oskar *Rusch*, for Independent Social Democracy its members Emil *Barth*, Paul *Eckert*, Georg *Ledebour*, Richard *Müller*, Paul *Neuendorf*, and Paul *Wegmann* were elected to the committee, which then received the name *Executive Committee* [*Vollzugsausschuss*]. The representatives of the *Spartakus* League, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, had declined any election into the committee once its parity composition had been resolved.

In the election of committee members for the Soldiers' Council any partiality was avoided as well. Naturally, it was a condition that those elected acknowledged the Revolution and placed itself on its side. But otherwise the most varied ranks and tendencies were represented. Among the 12 persons who were elected one finds officers, non-commissioned officers, and simple soldiers, Independents and Majority social democrats.

Their names are: Walz, Bartusch, von Beerfelde, Bergmann, Echtmann, Gerharft, Hase, Hertel, Köhler, Lampert, Brutus Molkenbuhr, Wimpel.

After the vote was finished, it was a matter of appointing the provisional government of the Republic. Here, the representatives of the *Spartakus* tendency and their sympathising tendency among the Independent Social-Democrats made a final attempt to prevent the recognition of the leaders of the Majority socialists. Georg Ledebour, Karl Liebknecht, and others attacked them in the most strident way and thereby provoked a storm of dissent. Speech and counter-speech threatened to drag on interminably until finally one of the soldiers got to his feet and, to general assent among his comrades, called out: "If you do not finally come to an agreement about the government, we soldiers will appoint it by ourselves." That brought about the end of the debate, and when it then came to the vote, it was shown afresh that the intransigents [*die Unversöhnlichen*] at the time had only a vanishing minority of the workers behind them for their policy. The proposal by Chairman Barth to ratify the temporary cabinet comprising both parties was accepted with tumultuous approval, with only a few lone voices against. Finally, a motion was also accepted to release an appeal to the workers and soldiers of all countries, which informed them of the founding of the German Republic, and which should express the wish for the working people of all countries to join into a great socialist and democratic peaceful league of peoples.

After this extremely impressive assembly had ended, the now-confirmed six-man cabinet met for a short discussion, and took the name *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* [Council of People's Deputies]. They elected Fritz *Ebert* and Hugo *Haase* as equal chairmen of the *Rat*, and agreed to distribute the occupations with the cabinet's most important domains of work as follows:

Interior and *Heer*: Fritz Ebert;
Foreign Affairs and Colonies: Hugo Haase;
Finance: Philipp Scheidemann;
Demobilisation and Public Health: Wilhelm Dittmann;
Press and News Service: Otto Landsberg;
Social Policy: Emil Barth.

However, this did not mean the installation of the named men as ministers for the respective offices, but only their task to look after the immediate ongoing affairs with them, to receive incoming messages concerning them,

and other similar matters. The leadership of the Reich offices itself was reserved for particular Secretaries of State, in whose selection both the bourgeois parties who accepted the Republic and expert suitability and experience were taken into account where necessary. The leading basic principle was that either the Secretary of State themselves or their Undersecretary had to be proven members of Social Democracy. In cases where it was not a matter of becoming an actual official, but rather a commissariat was intended, the title *Assistant* [*Beigeordneter*] was chosen for the relevant persons. On the basis of proposals by the parties and negotiation with the personalities in question, these offices were newly filled in the next few days as follows:

1. *Offices with social-democratic Secretaries of State*: Reich Economic Office, Secretary Dr. August *Müller*, Undersecretary Robert *Schmidt*, Assistant Dr. August *Erdmann*; Reich Food Office, Emanuel *Wurm*; Reich Labour Office, Secretary Gustav *Bauer*, Undersecretary Johann *Giesbert*, Assistant Hermann *Jäckel*.
2. *Offices with social-democratic Undersecretaries or Assistants*: Foreign Office, Secretary Dr. *Solf*, Undersecretary Eduard *David*, Assistant Karl *Kautsky*; Reich *Marine* Office, Assistants Gustav *Noske* and Ewald *Vogtherr*; Reich Office for Demobilisation, Secretary Dr. *Koeth*, Assistants Otto *Büchner* and Oswald *Schumann*; War Ministry, Secretary *Scheüch*, Undersecretary Paul *Göhre*, Assistant Ernst *Däumig*; Reich Justice Ministry, Secretary Dr. *Krause*, Assistant Dr. Oskar *Cohn*; Reich Post Office *Rüdlin*; Reich Treasury Office, Secretary Dr. *Schiffer*, Assistant Eduard *Bernstein*.

Some time later, the Democrat Dr. Hugo *Preuß* was appointed as Secretary of State for the Interior.

Of the named men, Gustav *Bauer*, Eduard *David*, Paul *Göhre*, August *Müller*, Gustav *Noske*, Robert *Schmidt*, and Oswald *Schumann* belonged to the Social-Democratic Party, and Eduard *Bernstein*, Otto *Büchner*, Oskar *Cohn*, Ernst *Däumig*, August *Erdmann*, Hermann *Jäckel*, Karl *Kautsky*, Ewald *Vogtherr*, and Emanuel *Wurm* to Independent Social Democracy.

The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils elected as its chairman *Hauptmann* [Captain] von Beerfelde, who belonged to no party, although he stepped down after only a few days and was replaced by Brutus *Molkenbuhr*, a member of the Social-Democratic Party, as well as

the metalworker Richard *Müller* of Independent Social Democracy as his superior.

The *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* appeared before the German people on 12 November with the following appeal:

To the German people!

The government that has emerged from the Revolution, whose political leadership is purely socialist, has set itself the task of realising the socialist programme. It now already decrees the following with legal force:

1. The *state of siege* is lifted.
2. The *right of association* and of *assembly* is subject to no restrictions, even for officials and state workers.
3. *Censorship* will not take place. *Theatre censorship* is lifted.
4. *Expression of opinion* in speech and writing is *free*.
5. *Freedom of practising religion* is guaranteed. Nobody may be compelled to any religious activity.
6. *Amnesty* is granted for all political offences. Legal proceedings pending because of such offences are quashed.
7. The *Auxiliary Services Act* is *repealed*, with the exceptions of the provisions pertaining to the resolution of disputes.[1]
8. The *Servants' Laws* are suspended. Likewise the emergency laws against agricultural labourers.
9. The *provisions for workers' protection* suspended at the start of the war are hereby brought back into force.

Further social-policy ordinances will be published shortly, and at the latest on 1 January 1919 the *eight-hour maximum work day* will enter into force. The government will do everything to ensure sufficient *opportunity for work*. An ordinance about *support for the unemployed* has been completed. It divides the burdens between the Reich, *Land* [state], and community [*Gemeinde*]. In the domain of *sickness insurance*, compulsory insurance will be extended beyond the previous threshold of 2500 marks.—*Housing need* will be tackled by making homes available.—We will work towards securing regulated food sustenance for the people.

The government will maintain *ordered* production, and protect *property* against *private infringement* as well as the *freedom* and *security* of the person.—

All elections for public bodies are from now on to be conducted according to the *equal*, *secret*, *direct*, *general* franchise on the basis of a proportional electoral system for all male and female persons of at least 20 years.—This franchise also applies for the

constitutive assembly,

about which more detailed determination will follow.

Berlin, 12 November 1918.
Ebert, Haase, Scheidemann, Landsberg, Dittmann, Barth.

With that, the Republic was initially proclaimed as a democratic Republic with socialist policy. Besides ordinances that directly concern the working class and secure it valuable rights, we find in the appeal also the assurance that property should be protected from private infringements, and that production should be maintained in its ordered course, so that for the citizenry there was no cause for panic. At the time, this was gratefully acknowledged even by the press of the parties of agrarian and urban property-owners.

But a state of fully regulated order was not immediately brought about. People's spirits had been stirred into agitation, the furthest-reaching hopes were awakened, the most audacious projects dared to emerge and demanded to be taken into consideration, goodwill and fantasy merged here and there into the wildest proposals. Even otherwise rationally-thinking persons lost their gauge of what would be practical to carry out. In the working class, just as in wide circles of the intellectuals, they were united that profound changes had to come, but as for how and where, these proposals not uncommonly contradicted one another in quite substantial points. But above this fluctuation of ideas, which needed clarification, stood the political experience of the *Volksbeauftragte*, which showed the way—men who, apart from the still youthful Emil Barth, were politicians with parliamentary training, and had in Hugo Haase and Otto Landsberg two keen-minded jurists of repute, and in Wilhelm Dittmann and Fritz Ebert two *Praktiker* [parliamentary practitioners] of the day-to-day wrangling and struggle of the working class, proven through long years of activity as workers' secretaries. And behind them, these men had as their support a working class that was more strongly politically and economically organised than any political revolution had known before, with quite specific traditions and a strongly-developed sense for discipline in all the phases of struggle. Before the Revolution, the *Heer* had acted as an opposing force to it. But now, when the soldiers had gone over to the people and declared themselves in favour of the Republic, the latter's peaceful development seemed to be secured.

From all parts of Germany, news came that similar uprisings had led to the—partly voluntary, partly involuntary—resignation of their previous governments and to the declaration of the Republic. What form the previous German Reich would ultimately take under these circumstances,

whether that of a unitary republic or that of a federal republic, was still to be decided, but there was no doubt anymore that the monarchies had ceased to play their role in Germany. It had turned out differently than in Freiligrath's *Battle at the Birch Tree*. But the poet's final words in his staggering piece *The Dead to the Living* had been fulfilled:

> The boding eagles leave the land—
> the lions' claws are shorn—
> The sovereign people, roused and bold,
> await the future's morn.[2]

Notes

1. The 1916 Auxiliary Services Act (*Gesetz über den vaterländischen Hilfsdienst*) was a German law introduced during WW1, which marked a turn towards the policy of total war required by the Hindenburg Programme. It fully oriented the German economy towards the war effort, demanding the mobilisation of all material and manpower resources required to prepare Germany for modern, industrialised warfare. In exchange for suspending free choice over workplaces, to shore up support among majority parties in the Reichstag and help stave off labour conflicts with German workers, the law provided for a system of shop-level conciliation committees, and recognised trade unions as equal negotiating partners on a par with employers.
2. Ferdinand Freiligrath, 'From the Dead to the Living', Bayard Taylor (tr.), in Käthe Freiligrath-Krocker (ed.), *Poems: From the German of Ferdinand Freiligrath* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1871), p. 223.

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CHAPTER 9

The Revolution in the Individual States

Prussia

What took place in Berlin with regard to the transformation of the Reich's government self-evidently also had its immediate effects on the government of Prussia. After a successful understanding between the leaderships of the two socialist parties, and with the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, a revolutionary people's government was also nominated for Prussia on 10 November, which was composed of the Majority socialists Paul Hirsch, Otto Braun, and Eugen Ernst, as well as the Independent socialists Heinrich Ströbel and Adolf Hoffmann. The post of the sixth member was initially filled by the Majority socialist Kurt Hänisch, who was then replaced by the Independent socialist Kurt Rosenfeld. Of the ministries, four were immediately staffed by social democrats after the model that one Majority socialist and one Independent socialist was each at the head of one of them, namely:

Paul Hirsch (M) and Emil Eichhorn (I)—Interior;
Adolf Hoffmann (I) and Konrad Hänisch (M)—Culture and Education;
Otto Braun (M) and Adolf Hofer (I)—Agriculture;
Albert Südekum (M) and—sometime later—Hugo Simon (I)—Finance.

The Ministry of Justice was left to Peter Spahn, member of the Centre party, that of Commerce to the Progressive [*Fortschrittler*] Fischbeck.

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When Emil Eichhorn then took over as Berlin Chief Constable, the Independent socialist Rudolf Breitscheid took his place, and in place of Peter Spahn, who stood down from the Justice Ministry towards the end of November, its leadership was given under parity to Wolfgang Heine (M) and Kurt Rosenfeld (I). The Majority socialist Otto Hue was placed at the side of Commerce Minister Fischbeck as his Assistant. The office of War Minister was left to Scheüch, who was appointed last, with the Majority socialist Paul Göhre as his Undersecretary. The Ministry for Public Works was taken over by the Progressive deputy Hoff, with L. Brunner (M) and Paul Hoffmann (I) as his Assistants.

The nomination as Minister for Culture and Education of Adolf Hoffmann, who is known as a leader of the non-denominational movement in Berlin, and whose speeches are not uncommonly flecked with various grammatical solecisms that are unique to Berliners, provoked vigorous protests from the side of the clergy and the academically-educated teachers. This was accommodated by means of complementing Hoffmann with the scientifically-educated Independent socialist M. Baege. The name of the ministry is amended to *Ministry for Science, Art, and People's Education [Volksbildung]*, and on 27 November, through a decree by this ministry, *clerical oversight over regional schools in Prussia is abolished*, and transferred to the *circuit school inspectors.* Regarding other reforms, differences of opinion soon appeared between Hänisch and Hoffmann about their way and method—in addition to the difficulties of administering the other offices.

Bavaria

The second-largest state of Germany had preceded the Reich and Prussia in its Revolution. Here, up to 1918, Majority Social Democracy had dominated the workers' minds almost unchallenged. Only in Munich, the highly-talented Kurt Eisner, who was painstakingly eking out a living there as a free socialist author and as an opponent of the Majority's war policy, had gathered around himself a community of like-minded socialists, which was not very numerous, but for all that all the more enterprising, and did not let off from their diligent propaganda activities when Eisner was remanded in custody in order to be sentenced for inciting high treason because of a speech he gave at one of the demonstrations that were being held all over Germany in support of actions to bring about peace.[1] Eisner, it should incidentally be observed—filled with the conviction, which he spiritedly

championed among the closer circle of his friends, that leading socialists would have to make great personal sacrifices in order to galvanise and encourage the people to energetic resistance against the war policy of the government and the imperialist parties, and with the intention of setting an example—had set aside all consideration for state prosecution and military censorship in that speech, so that he faced the certain prospect of being sentenced to a very heavy punishment. Freed in the October days of 1918, he immediately resumed his agitation with fiery zeal, and was now recognised by the masses, among whom the followers of the extremely radical *Spartakus* group were engaged in very active canvassing, as their leading spokesman. When thereupon the news arrived in Munich about the insurrection in Kiel, they found the mood there ripe for a revolution, and Eisner, who combined an idealism bordering on unworldliness [*Weltfremdheit*] with a strong sense for practical courses of action, was circumspect enough, despite the deep differences of opinion that prevailed between him and the leaders of the Majority socialists, to keep the party dispute as far away from his movement as possible. A gigantic demonstration, which took place on the Teresienwiese in Munich on 7 November 1918, had besides him the most influential leader of the Majority socialists in Munich, Erhard *Auer*, as one of its main speakers. Their words were received with the greatest imaginable enthusiasm, the mood was radically revolutionary, and a resolution that Eisner had written was adopted with jubilation, the start of which read:

> The German people knows itself to be as one with all the people of Europe in its will to secure the future of the world through a general league of right and freedom, and looks forward faithfully to the fulfilment of the world peace proclaimed by the President of the American Union.

The following demands are named after that: immediate resignation of the Kaiser and relinquishment of the throne by his heir. Swearing the *Heer* to the constitution, removal of all provisions from the constitution that inhibit Germany's full democratisation. All immediate measures to be taken to vouch for order, security, and calm once the troops are sent home, comprehensive social provision, measures for those in need, unemployment insurance, eight-hour working day.

Then it goes on:

> Only by fulfilling these demands as rapidly as possible can we steer through the dangers of political and social disintegration conjured up by this absurd war, can a development that is beneficent for the German people and for world culture be secured for the people's state [*Volksstaat*] and the people's government [*Volksregierung*].
>
> All participants solemnly vow to foster the accomplishment of these demands in word and deed, according to the best of their knowledge and conscience, and where it is needed also at the cost of personal sacrifices for the welfare of the whole, in the spirit of political-social responsibility and self-denial. Prudence, energy, and the serene awareness of their own strength are the only fighting means that guarantee success for the rising working class.
>
> This resolution is to be delivered immediately by the party leadership to the Bavarian government.

After the end of the assembly, the demonstrators moved through the city in a mighty procession, whereby they expressed their mood in the most manifold ways. Weapons shops are stormed and plundered, the royal guard are disarmed, "Down with the Kaiser! Up the Republic!" shouted in front of the royal palace, the soldiers are fetched out of their barracks and join the procession, the inmates of the military jail are freed. At last, the Landtag building is occupied, and in the deputies' chamber a council of workers, soldiers, and peasants is elected with Kurt Eisner as its first chairman. It sits in session until well into the night, and resolves to declare Bavaria a republic. An appeal that announces this contains among others the following passages:

> *Bavaria is from now on a free state* [*Freistaat*]. A people's government, which has the confidence of the masses, shall be installed without delay. A constitutive *Nationalversammlung* [National Assembly], for which all men and women of age have the right to vote, will be called as quickly as possible. A new age is beginning. *Bavaria wants to prepare Germany for the league of peoples.* The Democratic and Social Republic of Bavaria has the moral strength to bring Germany a peace that will protect it from the worst.
>
> The Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Council will keep strictest order. Riots will be suppressed without hesitation. Security of the person and property is guaranteed. The soldiers in the barracks will rule themselves through soldiers' councils and maintain discipline. Officers who do not oppose the requirements of this changed time shall carry out their duty unaffected.

> We count on the constructive assistance of the entire population. Everyone who works towards this new freedom is welcome. All officials stay in their posts. Fundamental social and political reforms are put in motion without delay. The peasants vouch for the provision of the towns with foodstuffs. The old opposition between countryside and town will vanish. The exchange of provisions will be organised rationally.

After a word of warning to the workers and citizens of Munich, to trust in the great and monumental things that were taking place in these fateful days, to help ensure that the inevitable upheaval take place "rapidly, easily, and safely", and to respect every human life as sacred, the appeal closes with the words:

> The socialists' civil war is over for Bavaria. On the revolutionary foundation that is now given, the working masses will now be led back to unification. Long live the Bavarian Republic! Long live peace! Long live the constructive labour of all workers!

An appeal to the rural population of Bavaria, held in the same spirit, which is signed apart from Eisner also by the leader of a democratic peasants' association, Ludwig Ganghofer, contains the following notable passages:

> The Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Council regards it as its first and greatest task to bring the people the peace it has been ardently longing for, and has entered into negotiations with the Entente powers for the purpose of bringing about peace negotiations.
>
> But the danger is not yet past. The Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Council refuses to undertake national defence, but it will under all circumstances maintain border protections, so that the life and property of the Bavarian population is protected and preserved.
>
> … Peasants! Food provisions are low in the cities due to perverse measures of the previous military and civil administration. We call on you to immediately support the new government by actively delivering food to the cities, for only thereby can it be in the position to control the masses and avoid hunger riots with their inevitable disastrous consequences for the flatland.
>
> Officials, mayors, and land army! You are called on to ensure calm, order, and security in the country, and to carry out the affairs of your offices in their previous form.
>
> We do not wish to destroy, but to rebuild.

On 8 November, Eisner presented the list to the new government at a second session of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. The speech in which he did so is so indicative of the manner of thinking of this man, who in those days enjoyed the greatest influence over the excited mass of the people, that it seems advisable to reproduce some of the most important parts of it *verbatim*.

After outlining the reasons that told against any further deferral of this action, it reads:

> *Bavaria is a free state.* The Bavarian people enjoys the freest self-determination. *A constitutive Nationalversammlung* will at a time of calmer development settle the final constitution of Bavaria. Today, in this parliament prevail the elemental driving forces of the broad masses of the people themselves. In this session today, the responsibility rests on us now to order this new development. We will propose to you to ratify a government, to give a government your confidence, that will then at all times carry on the affairs of Bavaria for you responsibly. This government is not designed one-sidedly according to the proposals and the understandings that have taken place in the meantime. You know that, almost since the start of the war, the masses of socialist workers have stood in a fierce conflict of opinions against one another. This conflict belongs, for Bavaria at least, to history. For the masses have liberated Bavaria, and even the tendency which has fought against people like me accepts this liberation as an immutable revolutionary fact, and thereby we have grown together, not through a compromise, but intimately. I hope that our Bavarian example will have an effect beyond our borders.
>
> To close, I would like to give you the names of those who will form the provisional government. With one exception, although some arguments told against this, we have retained the old division of ministries. We have created only one new ministry, which has already been in the air for a long time, a ministry for social affairs. The reason why we have kept the not exactly fortunate division of ministries is that we did not want to make it harder for the officials, whose glad assistance and cooperation we are counting on, these officials, whose lot in democracy will surely be quite different than hitherto, to find their way in these new conditions. The names we propose to you are:
>
> *The man who is standing before you now* will take over the *Foreign* Ministry and with that the *Presidency*, as a symbol of the revolutionary origin of this government. For the Vice-Presidency and for the *Culture Ministry* we propose J. *Hoffmann*.

Roßhäupter will take over the Ministry for *Military Affairs*—we shall have no War Ministry, but a Ministry for Military Affairs; it is fitting for the democratic government that a civilian takes over the leadership of military affairs.

The Ministry of the *Interior*, today one of the most important affairs, *Auer* will take over, if you agree. I can hear dissent and "No!", but if we are determined to go our way together, then this is a symbol too. For that reason, I commend the choice of Auer to you.

Transport a man shall take over who was once engulfed by one of the most ridiculous political comedies in this house, Heinrich *von Frauendorfer*.

The *Justice Ministry* will be staffed by a seasoned social-policy expert [*Sozialpolitiker*]—that is not a contradiction, justice should well be regarded as a form of social policy—Herr *Timm*.

The most thankless of all tasks, and perhaps this is partly the fault of my aversion to professors, should fall to Professor *Jaffé*, namely the *Finance Ministry*.

Finally—again as a fanfare to its revolutionary origin—a man who participated in the uprising, a simple worker without office or honours, Herr *Unterleitner*, will take over the *new Ministry for Social Affairs*.

A position that is very important in this mad time, the police authority of the capital of the new Republic, will again lie in the hands of a workers' and soldiers' council, in the hands of Herr *Steiner*, who since yesterday is already providing beneficial services as the supervisor in the police headquarters. He belongs to the most industrious and characterful persons of our revolutionary uprising.

You see, we are not one-sided. We have neither favoured particular tendencies, nor have we excluded bourgeois experts. I would like to believe that this Ministry will develop into a body in which all men have room, regardless of their prior education and background, in which all can take an active part that can render us fruitful work in accordance with their character, knowledge, energy, or mindset. I ask you to trust us, who make this sacrifice in a tumultuous time, in a time in which we cannot promise you paradise, in which all circumstances seem desperate. So I say: grant us and our transitional and provisional Ministry the confidence that we deserve for having found ourselves ready to take up this position, if you agree. We are approaching dark days, perhaps the most fearful days that have befallen us for centuries. But I am firmly convinced that out of this sea of blood and destruction a new world will still rise up, a brighter and a richer and a freer world, and the political upheaval that we have here experienced and which we are defending—we have a soldiers' council so that it will defend this new freedom—I say that this political revolution has sounded the opening note

> for the social transformation that will be the most sacred and undeferrable matter for international work after peace.
>
> With that, I greet the first parliament of the Bavarian Republic, and ask you to make proposals for the constitution of the presidium.

After hearing this speech, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council is constituted as a revolutionary parliament with a presidium composed of Majority socialists, Independent socialists, and Democrats. The Majority socialist Franz *Schmitt* becomes president, vice-president the Independent socialist Fritz *Schröder*, and second vice-president the Democrat and pacifist Dr. Ludwig *Quidde*. The ministers proposed were elected unanimously, with the exception of Erhard Auer, against whom the *Spartakus* people voted, who was elected by an overwhelming majority. From Brussels, on 10 November, Crown Prince Rupprecht protested against the new revolutionary order, and demanded a decision by a constitutive *Landesversammlung* [*Land* Assembly], whereas King Ludwig III, who had left Munich by car with his wife on 8 November, sent the following declaration of abdication to the government from *Schloss* Anif in the Bavarian crown estate of Salzburg:

> All my life I have worked with the people and for the people. Caring for the welfare of my beloved Bavaria was constantly my highest aspiration.
>
> Since as a result of the events of the last few days I am no longer in the position to lead the government any further, I release all officials, officers, and soldiers from their duty of continuing to work in the given circumstances, and from the oath of allegiance they have sworn to me.
>
> Anif, 13 November 1918. *Ludwig*.

The council of ministers answered his letter still on the same day with an edict that acknowledged the king's relinquishing the throne, and permitted the King and his family unrestricted residence in Bavaria so far as they avouched "not to undertake anything against the existence of the People's State of Bavaria". Protests by the presidium of the Bavarian Chamber of Deputies and the chairmen of the bourgeois parties against the sidelining of the Chamber remained ineffectual, other than that, after the government had announced that it did not intend any seizure of bank or savings assets, economic life went on calmly for the time being. An ordinance by the Minister for Military Affairs of 11 November, which calls on the members of the *Heer* garrison to continue to fulfil their previous

duties, is complemented on 12 November by the following decree by the Munich Soldiers' Council:

> Soldiers! On 12 November, in accordance with the corresponding resolution of the Munich Soldiers' Council and the Minister for Military Affairs, Roßhäupter, the previous officers and all officials will resume their duties.
>
> Soldiers! Demobilisation will now begin in the next few days. The officers come with good intent and at the behest of Minister Roßhäupter to provide for the many hundreds of thousands of comrades at the front and release them back home! The officers do not come as your superiors as before, but rather as soldiers, who want to work towards the welfare of our people. You are not obliged to salute the officers, whether on or off duty. Whatever these officers order can only be mandated with the consent of a barracks council that you will elect. Be confident that your Soldiers' Council will keep the strictest watch that the officers will not overstep their authority! The Munich Soldiers' Council cautions officers to remain conscious at every moment of the new spirit of the free People's State of Bavaria, to put away their epaulettes, and, now it has become established fact, to carry out the work of securing order as fruitfully as it was performed day and night by the soldiers since the victory of the Revolution. Soldiers! Very shortly you will hear how your Soldiers' Council has ensured your inalienable rights. Have confidence in us! Nobody can wrest the free People's State away from us anymore.

The uprising in Munich was joined by similar ones in Nuremberg, Augsburg, Regensburg, and other cities, which seemed to vindicate the optimism that shines out of this appeal. By contrast, the news about the armistice conditions imposed on Germany brought them their first disappointment. This was expressed in an appeal by the Ministry of the new People's State, signed by Eisner, to the governments and peoples of America, France, England, and Italy, as well as to the proletarians of all countries, which describes the enthusiasm with which the people had declared the Republic, and then continues:

> This is the moment in which the publication of the armistice conditions of the Allied powers burst upon the young Republic. All the hopes that we could cherish with the success of the Revolution are thereby destroyed. If these appalling conditions should be unalterable, the new Republic will in the shortest time become wasteland and chaos.

That could not happen. The democratic peoples could not wish that the revolutionary creation of German democracy be annihilated by the victors' ruthlessness. Now "the hour had come, where by an act of far-sighted magnanimity the reconciliation of peoples could be brought about". The League of Peoples could "never come about if it begins with the extermination of the youngest member of democratic civilisation. We implore you, governments as well as peoples, to undertake the dissolution of the world war, which is fateful for us all, through an act of lofty self-abnegation through shared work between victors and vanquished".

This appeal did not resonate with those to whom it was directed. All the same, it must be noted that Eisner later judged the armistice conditions somewhat differently than he did on the basis of the first dispatches by the German negotiators, and sharply attacked the latter because of how they had reported them.

Saxony

After negotiations had taken place during the last third of October between the Prime Minister and the parties of the peace bloc about forming a new Ministry by incorporating representatives of these parties, which had led to the result that on 1 November, among others two Majority socialists, the deputies *Fräßdorf* and *Heldt* entered the Ministry, the Revolutionary wave washed over Saxony as well as early as 8 November. On this day, in Leipzig, the centre of Saxony's Independent Social Democracy, mass processions of workers and soldiers take place, force the General Headquarters to capitulate, occupy the Post Office, and disarm the police. In their barracks, the soldiers elect a Soldiers' Council, and a Workers' Council made up of the regional leadership of Independent Social Democracy negotiates with them on behalf of the working class through its spokesmen, the Reichstag deputy Fritz *Geyer*, and the writer *Lipinski*. A more limited committee drawn from both councils constitutes the actual executive authority. The news of this successful uprising leads to mass gatherings and processions elsewhere in Saxony that same evening. In the capital Dresden, where the old Social-Democratic Party is well represented, a temporary Workers' and Soldiers' Council is formed during the night of 8 to 9 November, for the most part consisting of members of this party, which takes over leadership of the Dresden garrison, whereupon even in the same night the King leaves Dresden along with his family, and withdraws to one of his remote castles. On 9 November, the Independent

Social Democrats for their part form a Workers' and Soldiers' Council with a radical programme, and bring the General Headquarters and other public buildings under their control. However, late that evening, an agreement takes place between the two social-democratic bodies after longer negotiations. A united revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council is formed, declares Saxony a Republic even during the night of 9 to 10 November, and resolves the following proclamation:

> *To the Saxon people!* The King has been deposed from his throne. The Wettin dynasty has ceased to exist.
>
> The First Chamber is dissolved. The Second Chamber also is no more.
>
> The Ministries of State, which are provisionally continuing to manage their business with the assent of the United Revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council, have immediately announced new elections on the basis of general, equal, secret, and direct suffrage for men and women. Long live the Social Republic of Saxony!

Over the course of 10 November, a great assembly takes place in the Circus Sarrasani, summoned by the United Revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council, between the representatives, etc., of the Dresden working class. It receives with the most joyous excitement the account delivered by the Independent Fleißner of the events that had taken place, as well as a series of addresses by representatives of the movement from both camps. At the end of the discussion, soldiers and workers head to the *Schloss* and there hoist the red flag. Negotiations with the Minister of the Interior Dr. Koch, who is asked, at the same time as the announcement that the previous ministers are relieved of their offices, whether he was prepared to personally continue to administer his office for the time being in the interests of maintaining well-regulated provision of foodstuffs, etc., has the result that the Minister declares that he could not stay in office longer than his colleagues, since the Ministry as a whole had a unitary political mandate, but also promises to call on his officials to continue to carry out their work under the new executive committee. A notice to the officials drawn up by him in this vein and published on 12 November observes in its introduction that the United Revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council, which had all the state's instruments of power at its disposal, had declared that notwithstanding all planned radical political changes, it was determined to maintain public safety and the provision of the *Land* with food and raw materials, emphasising that in this it was a

matter of the most important requirements of the hour, and issues an urgent request "to all officials and employees" of the Interior Ministry "in agreement with the Ministry as a whole" to stay in their posts and carry out their duties. More than ever must "in these difficult days the phrase hold true: the Fatherland *über alles*."

Days later, on 13 November, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council receives a note from the same minister saying that the King is giving up the throne and has released all officers and officials from their oath of allegiance, and on 14 November, a notice is published by the Ministry as a whole [*Gesamtministerium*] repeating this announcement. Since the King had expressed his wish that officials might carry on serving their fatherland with all their strength even under the changed form of government, the ministers declare themselves ready to continue administering the offices entrusted to them in the interests of public order "insofar and so long as they are still able to do so".

Meanwhile, the following appeal has been agreed by commissaries of the workers' and soldiers' councils of Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz, and is likewise published on 14 November:

> To the Saxon people!
>
> The capitalist system has experienced its collapse. The bourgeois monarchic government has been toppled. The revolutionary proletariat has taken over public power. Its aim is the socialist Republic. Realising socialism means: Transforming capitalist into societal production; expropriation of private property in landed estates, mines and metalworks, raw materials, banks, machines, means of transport, etc., conversion of commodity into socialist production, takeover of production by the proletariat. It is the task of the socialist government to continue the Revolution and foster it until it completely overcomes the ruling bourgeois class. Realising the Republic means absolute rule of the will of the working class, abolition of servitude in any form, general arming of the people to protect the achievements of the Revolution, removal of all kinds of income without work, separation of church and state, removal of all bourgeois law courts. The republican government of Saxony has the special task of bringing about the dissolution of the Saxon state and making the unitary socialist German Republic a fact.
>
> The commissaries of the workers' and soldiers' councils of Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz:
>
> Schwarz. Neuring. Fleißner. Rühle. Geyer. Lipinski. Seeger. Heckert. Fellisch.

The majority of the signatories belong partly to Independent Social Democracy and partly to the Communist Party, and the spirit of these par-

ties infuses the phrasing of this appeal. In it, just as in the protest by the representatives of the workers' and soldiers' councils of these three cities, which was likewise published on 14 November, against the decree by the Reich government under which the relationship of superiority between officers and troops should continue for the time being, already comes to the fore the redissolution of the unity that had only just come about between socialists. In Dresden and Chemnitz, where the members of Majority Social Democracy had the great mass of the workers behind them, the former had agreed with the Independents to compose the workers' and soldiers' council on the basis of parity, but in Leipzig, where the Independents held power, these had not only rejected parity but even any consideration of the Majority socialists. Hence, they controlled the majority of votes in the revolutionary council of the three cities, and succeeded in ensuring that its resolutions mostly bore the stamp of their spirit.

This excess weight can also be seen in the distribution of ministries in the new Free State. On 15 November, it was explained to the ministers who were awaiting a decision about their future positions that there was "no framework" for their continued activity, and the all ministerial spots would be filled from the ranks of the Revolutionary parties. This happened in the form that a *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* was named, comprising six people, which at the same time constituted the Ministry as a whole, that is, the cabinet. In this, parity was not to be avoided, so the most politically influential ministries were allocated to members of Independent Social Democracy, namely Interior and Foreign Affairs to *Lipinski*, Finance to Fritz *Geyer*, the Military to *Fleißner*. The Majority socialists received Culture and Education—*Buck*; Justice—Georg *Gradnauer;* and Labour—*Schwarz*. In a notice dated 16 November, the Ministry announced the temporary regulation of the tasks and powers of the local workers' and soldiers' councils, whereby these were to be involved in all sessions of the district committees, and had to control the execution of the ordinances of the central government by local administrations, and developed its actual programme for government in an appeal to the Saxon people on 18 November. In contrast to the appeal by the United Revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council reproduced above, this comprehensive address is held in a thoroughly sober way. After observing that the radical change in public power had been completed, it identifies the task of the new government as follows:

> To lead the *Land* through the great difficulties of the present situation, to secure its democratic achievements, and to realise economic restructurings according to socialist fundamental principles. The working class does not only need political rights, but also emancipation from economic oppression, which only socialism can bring to its full extent. …
>
> … The government wants to act in concert with the new Reich leadership. So far as ordinances by the Reich leadership do not meet with our approval, we will assert our views against them. We will complement the decrees proclaimed by the Reich leadership with legal force with regulations for Saxony that also have legal force.

After developing a programme of work that in no way betrays an intention of proceeding rashly, the appeal closes with the words:

> The transition from war to a state of peace and the new building of economic life requires us to summon all our strengths. The organisations of the working class especially have to commit their utmost to master these difficulties. Only in this way can the spectre of hunger be averted and the way laid for a better future. Dire is the need of the time. Let everyone do their duty. If it survives this dangerous time of transition, then the German people will unfold itself to flourish anew in democratic-socialist development by dint of the immortal forces that live within it. Onwards! Upwards!

Evidently, this appeal was a work of compromise, in which the points about which serious differences of opinion obtained between the two parties represented in the government remained undiscussed, such as in the question of forming a new parliament. But with that, the endurance of this passable cooperation was seriously called into question.

Württemberg

After the incumbent Ministry of Weizsäcker had been dismissed on 6 November, and on 7 November a new radically-oriented Ministry had been formed under the chairmanship of Liesching, from the Democratic People's Party, with the inclusion of the social democrat Dr. Hugo Lindemann, the next day a committee comprising representatives of the Majority socialists and the united trade unions of Württemberg issues a declaration that outlines the following considerably more far-reaching programme of demands to be carried out immediately:

> The implementation of a republican state constitution.—General, equal, secret, direct enfranchisement in Reich, state, and community on the basis of proportional election for all citizens over 20 years.—Abolition of the First Chamber and all privileges of property and birth.—New election of parliaments.—The speedy bringing-about of a peace settlement, disarmament, and the dissolution of the standing *Heer*.—Immediate lifting of the state of siege and censorship.—Freeing of all civil and military persons interned on political and disciplinary grounds.—Removal of Auxiliary Services duty.—Implementation of all the measures for a transitional economy demanded by the trade unions, as well as the socialist programme of party and unions.—Repayment of war debts by complete seizure of war profits and great general levy on property assets [*Vermögensabgabe*].

On 9 November, an answer after a fashion appears to this in the form of an appeal by the new Ministry, which announces that the King had ordered the calling of a constitutive assembly in agreement with the Ministry, whose task should be to "give the *Land* a constitution appropriate to the needs of the new time". The King made clear that his person "would never be an obstacle to a development demanded by a majority of the population". But this declaration, and the attached "urgent caution and plea to preserve moderation in these days of the Fatherland's severe need in order to keep calm and order" could not hold back the revolutionary drive of the masses. Both social-democratic factions hold demonstrations with a vast attendance in the early morning on the square before the *Schloss*, and while the ministers were being sworn in inside, the popular orators outside were already speaking about the Republic. Then, the gathered people form a procession through the city, and hardly has this got going before soldiers force their way into the royal palace, declare the King to be deposed, and through their obstinacy cause the royal standard to be lowered. A workers' and soldiers' council is formed, and an understanding reached between the two social-democratic factions, on the basis of which a new provisional government takes shape that consists of four Majority socialists—W. *Blos* (Foreign Affairs), B. *Heymann* (Culture and Education), H. *Lindemann* (Labour), and H. *Mattutat* (Justice), two Independent socialists, A. *Crispien* (Interior) and *Thalheimer* (Finance), as well as *Schreiner* (War), a socialist with inclinations towards the *Spartakus* tendency. W. Blos and Arthur Crispien share the presidential chair.

An appeal published by this government states in its first paragraphs:

> To the Württembergian people! An almighty but mercifully bloodless Revolution took place today. *The Republic has been declared*.
>
> A new era of democracy and freedom has begun, the old powers are stepping aside, and the people that brought about the Revolution is taking over political power.
>
> Its next representation is the Working Committee comprising the free trade unions, the Social-Democratic Party, and the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, at whose disposal General von Ebbinghaus has placed himself and his officer corps to carry out the measures required to maintain public safety. These bodies will call on the services of suitable experts to continue the affairs of administration regardless of their political and religious orientation.
>
> The government is provisional and regards it as its first task to prepare for *a constitutive Land assembly* on the basis of the franchise demands announced in our programme.

After the Workers' and Soldiers' Council had ratified the government constituted in this way in its session of 10 November, the next day it undergoes a reallocation of some positions. It announces them in a new notice in the following sections:

> The provisional government has fulfilled its promise, given in its announcement of 9 November, of including suitable experts to continue administering its affairs regardless of their political or religious orientation. Herr *Baumann* for Food, *Kiene* for Justice, and *Liesching* for Finance have newly entered the government.

It continues further:

> Transport remains under the remit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The highest expert leaders remain for the railways State Councillor *Stieler*, President of the Directorate-General of State Railways, and for postage *Metzger*, the President of the Directorate-General for Post and Telegraphs.
>
> This arrangement of affairs has been made with the assent of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.

According to this, the Independent socialist Thalheimer, who belonged to the *Spartakus* League, and the Majority socialist Mattutat left the government, which now is no longer purely socialist. Of the newly-appointed ministers, Baumann belongs to the National-Liberal Party, Kiene to *Zentrum*, and Liesching to the Progressive People's Party. On the same

day, 11 November, the action committee of the temporary workers' councils issues a call for the election of permanent councils on the basis of provisions published at the same time. The elections mostly result in majorities for the old Social-Democratic Party. The bourgeois parties publish statements according to which they submit to the new state of affairs under certain reservations, and express their ready willingness for positive collaboration. The King informs the temporary government through his *chef de cabinet* on 16 November that he wishes all persons who have obligated themselves to loyalty and obedience towards him through their oath of allegiance to be released from this obligation. But that is not found to be sufficient, and on 30 November, the King declares that he is giving up the throne, and assumes the title of Duke of Württemberg. His farewell note directed at the people of Württemberg reads:

> To the Württembergian people! As I have already stated, my person shall never be an obstacle to the free development of the conditions of the *Land* and its well-being.
>
> Guided by this thought, *I am abdicating from the throne as of today.*
>
> I thank from the bottom of my heart all who have loyally served me for 27 years or otherwise proved their worth, above all too our heroic troops, who have kept the enemy far from our Fatherland over four years of the most grievous struggle with the greatest self-sacrifice, and only with my final breath will my love for our dear homeland and its people be extinguished.
>
> In this, I speak at the same time in the name of my consort, who only lays down her former extensive work for the welfare of the poor and the sick with a heavy heart.
>
> God bless, keep, and protect our beloved Württemberg forevermore! This is my last farewell!
>
> Bebenhausen, 30 November 1918. *Wilhelm.*

At the same time, the temporary government publishes the following statement in the *Württembergischer Staatsanzeiger*, also signed by the Independent social democrat Crispien:

> The provisional government accepts the abdication of the King. A succession in line with §7 of the Württemberg Constitutional Charter is ruled out in light of the conditions brought about by the revolution of 9 November.
>
> The provisional government thanks the King in the name of the people for being moved in all his conduct by his love for our homeland and our people, and for having contributed through his voluntary resignation to

> smoothing the path for the development of freedom. The Württembergian people will not forget that the King and his consort have consistently acted nobly and helpfully in their altruistic works.

With that, the abolition of the monarchic system of government was recognised by the legal bearer of this system in Württemberg as well.

* * *

Just like in Saxony and Württemberg, radical transformations in the form of the state and the formation of provisional socialist-republican governments supported by workers' and soldiers' councils take place in the remaining German federal states. The princes, some of whom enjoyed personal sympathy in socialist circles as well, initially seek to save their form of government by accommodating the demand for a new ordering of affairs, but later entirely *give up* their thrones without any attempt at resistance. Likewise, committees of workers' and soldiers' councils take the reins of government in the Hanseatic cities as well. The social-democratic parties are united in this. But it is a cooperation compelled only by the pressure of circumstances, in some cases even by the masses, as in Berlin. The contradictions in respect of methods of struggle are in no way remedied, and are zealously kept alive by a new wave of feverish activism on the part of the members of the *Spartakus* group.

Note

1. Kurt Eisner (1867–1919), German journalist and socialist politician, long-standing pacifist and anti-monarchist, joined the USPD in protests against German war conduct during WW1, proclaimed a republican Free State of Bavaria at the start of the German Revolution, first Minister-President of Bavaria November 1918–February 1919, assassinated by a nationalist aristocrat.

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CHAPTER 10

Struggles of Socialists Against Socialists

As clear as it had to be to every socialist that the good progress of the Revolution depended on the steadfast collaboration of the socialist factions—since political power had gone over to them—it proved to be just as difficult in practice to realise this collaboration to the required degree and for the necessary duration. One may well say that the great majority of the leading members of both social-democratic factions did not lack the goodwill to do so. But collaboration was not achieved with this goodwill alone, so long as fundamental consensus was not reached at least regarding the most important questions of the attitude they should observe and the measures they should take. But quite a few things were missing in this respect, as soon became clear. The first effect was that, especially in the Reich, as the Republic of Germany was still called, the work of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* got off to an uncommonly sluggish start, and the personalities who comprised it afforded little satisfaction. They faced each other, three against three, so in the case of differences of opinion between one group and the other, they were forced to rely on long-drawn-out negotiations to achieve any resolution at all, and, where one was not to be reached, had to leave several matters that needed to be decided unresolved indefinitely.

The war and the variety of opinions during it had left such deep impressions on people's souls after all that it sometimes seemed as if the representatives of fundamentally different conceptions of life and society stood opposite each other. The Majority socialists had become fairly strongly

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aligned with the view of the bourgeois parties with regard to the specifically national questions, including the question of *Heer* matters, whereas the Independents had taken on a more intransigent standpoint than before the war. The former were inclined to make greater concessions to bourgeois interests than before, the latter were all the more disposed to defy them, while their followers throughout the country, shot through with Spartacist elements, impatiently urged them towards radical measures.

However, since on both sides they were thoroughly conscious of their great responsibilities, given time it would probably still have come to a relative *rapprochement* of their standpoints, if agitations from outside had not made sure that, on the contrary, these contradictions eventually began to intensify. Particularly fateful for the young Republic were on the one hand the mistakes by the Foreign Office and the German Armistice Commission in dealing with the state of affairs created by the harsh demands of the Entente, and on the other hand the disputes over the tasks and authorised powers of the workers' and soldiers' councils, which escalated into fateful clashes thanks to the grubby agitations [*wühlende Hetzarbeit*] of the elements gripped by Bolshevism.

When filling the posts in the Republic, the office of Foreign Secretary had been left in the hands of Minister Solf, who had proven himself a hardworking Colonial Minister, not unamenable to modern views, under the government of Wilhelm II, and who was known to have been an opponent of the Kaiser's war policy. Likewise, the *Zentrum* politician Mathias Erzberger was left the office of Undersecretary in the Foreign Office, and given the responsibility of representing the government at the armistice negotiations in Spa. However, both persons immediately committed major mistakes in their treatment of the latter question. One will not judge them too harshly for having lost their composure for a moment about the severity of the Entente's conditions, and could not object to the fact that they lodged a protest against those of them that seemed to them to be monstrous and in clear contradiction to the statements of the Allies' leading statesmen and in particular of President Wilson, and appealed to the public opinion of the civilised world. But in doing so, they repeatedly went too far in what they could reasonably defend, and presented as outrageous and murderous demands that were certainly very oppressive but—like the demand to deliver 5000 locomotives to replace the same number stolen from Belgium and France—still were not without justification and could have been carried out in a somewhat extended timeframe without serious damage. Apart from that, they were also so tactless as to call Wilson

against his allies again and again, whereby these were only irritated all the more, but Wilson's position in the council of the victors was made significantly more difficult. They also weakened the impactfulness of their protests themselves by barely letting a day pass before increasing their number with a new one. All this created a very uncomfortable mood that was detrimental to the Republic. The nationalists gloated that one could now see how perverse it had been to believe the Entente politicians' claims that their fight was only with German imperialism, not the German people. But in the socialist camp, the Independents' spokesmen demanded a change of personnel, while leading members of the Majorityists shied away from this, wherein regarding Erzberger they referred to his undeniably extensive expertise, and could ultimately point to a few small concessions he had attained.

This contradiction was broached publicly at the Reich conference of the new governments of the individual German states, now called "free states" [*Freistaaten*], which took place on 25 November 1918 in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. The meeting was opened by a measured address by Fritz Ebert, whereupon Herr Solf and Herr Erzberger gave their report about the armistice conditions and the prospects for a peace settlement. Their accounts sounded exceedingly pessimistic. They agreed that the worst was to be expected from the Entente's side, if a government recognised by the nation that could conclude a preliminary peace was not formed soon on the basis of elections. After they finished, Kurt Eisner, who was sitting next to them, took the floor as Bavaria's representative, and delivered an accusatory speech against them, which was extraordinarily harsh in its tone as well. Their activity could only be described as counter-revolutionary, and was severely damaging Germany. It was being shown that the negotiations with the Allies should not be led by people who had belonged to the old system in any way. In other words, they had to step aside at all costs. The Majorityists found his speech extremely unpleasant. Three of their speakers, Fritz Ebert, Wolfgang Heine, and Otto Landsberg, opposed Eisner, whereby they especially came to Erzberger's defence, whereas they made fewer apologies for Solf. He in fact shortly thereafter also resigned from his office, and was replaced at Hugo Haase's suggestion by Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau, who up to this point had been German ambassador to Copenhagen, from whose reports, sent to Berlin during the war, a clear grasp of the situation shines through, as well as candid criticism of war policy.

The conference then preoccupied itself further with the idea, championed by some radical members (Geither—Gotha, Merges—Braunschweig), of approaching the implementation of socialism without worrying about the question of peace, and of maintaining the rule of workers' and soldiers' councils until this was achieved, or to be precise, of abandoning the election of a *Nationalversammlung*. Yet the advocates of this idea remained with quite isolated voices in the minority. Apart from representatives of the Majority socialists, the most noteworthy representatives of Independent Social Democracy—Haase, Eisner, Crispien—spoke against it as well. Rather, the following paragraphs proposed by Ebert were accepted by a large majority as a summary of the results of the discussion:

1. Maintaining the unity of Germany is an urgent requirement. All German groups stand steadfastly by the German Republic. They oblige themselves to act decisively in the spirit of Reich unity, and to fight separatist endeavours.
2. Calling a constitutive *Nationalversammlung* is generally approved, likewise the intention of the Reich leadership to implement the preparations for the *Nationalversammlung* as soon as possible.
3. Until this *Nationalversammlung* meets, the workers' and soldiers' councils are the representatives of the people's will.
4. The Reich leadership is requested to work towards speedily bringing about a preliminary peace.

The conference further unanimously accepted the following resolution, after very impressive speeches by Secretary Wurm of the Reich Food Office, Dr. Koeth from the Demobilisation Office, August Müller from the Reich Labour Office, and Eugen Schiffer from the Reich Treasury:

> To maintain Germany's economic life, to secure the country's undisturbed provision with foodstuffs and raw materials from abroad, and to keep the German People's Republic in sound credit at home and abroad, the continued work of all banks, savings banks, and other credit institutes on their previous basis and in their previous form is absolutely essential. In agreement with the representatives of the individual German states, the Reich government hence declares that any infringement in the business activity of credit institutions is to be avoided.

One cannot retrospectively read Schiffer's account of the financial situation of the Republic without a feeling of melancholy. What he presented

there as an extremely troubling state of its finances now seems to us almost an ideal situation not quite two years later. However, the dangers that threatened the Republic's fisc already showed themselves clearly enough, and so Schiffer demanded even more emphatically than the speakers who had preceded him that the *Nationalversammlung* be called as quickly as possible. He outlined a tax programme that in respect of its radical approach to profits and property already somewhat anticipated the whole of the later Erzberger tax legislation, and hence won approval even on the left of the conference. But he added that implementing this programme would meet with a thousand difficulties if the legal basis for it was not created. Without this, it would in particular be quite impossible to accomplish anything effective against capital flight and tax avoidance.

Ebert's closing words, which referred to the necessity of work and self-discipline for the fruitful development of the Republic, also sounded the call for a *Nationalversammlung*.

But regarding this question, the opinions of the two social-democratic factions were still fairly far apart as far as the timeframe was concerned. Among the Majorityists, they were in favour of advertising the elections as soon as possible, whereas an influential wing among the mass of Berlin Independents, whose most determined speaker was Georg Ledebour, instead wanted to postpone the date as long as possible. Not to speak at all of the *Spartakus* League's followers, who as diligent students of the Russian Bolshevists opposed any legislative and administrative body formed on the basis of general elections.

The *Spartakus* League at that point in time was still a wing of Independent Democracy. It had emerged during the war from members of the most extreme opposition within the Social-Democratic Party, whom a small paper with articles signed "*Spartakus*", which appeared regularly and was distributed in secret, served as an intellectual connecting link, and had chosen its name after these articles, the lion's share of which came from the pen of Karl Liebknecht. As the opposition within the opposition led by Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann, and Georg Ledebour, he had been the first to advocate a split in the Social-Democratic Party, and under his influence this came about at a conference held by opponents of the party's war policy at Gotha at Easter 1917, where the unification of the opposition into its own party calling itself Independent Social Democracy was resolved by 76 votes to 44.

Hugo Haase, who had counselled against this separate formation, but then submitted to the majority decision, had cautioned the delegates

belonging to the *Spartakus* League at the end of this conference not to use the party organisation they had decided on merely as a "protective front to more conveniently pursue their separate goals", as had already been surreptitiously passed around by the delegate Heckert and others, but now to practise good party comradeship [*Parteigenossenschaft*]. But with that he had achieved no lasting effect. The *Spartakus* people sought to belabour the members of the new party in line with their agitation, which aimed for revolutionary uprisings, and where this did not succeed, carried on their own propaganda as before. This especially after the Bolshevists had come to power in Russia and, after the peace settlement at Brest-Litovsk, had set up an embassy in Berlin with Joffe as its chief. Support flowed to them from Joffe in the most varied forms, with the help of which they systematically prepared the ground for insurrectionary movements on a grander scale, and eventually went on to buy weapons. In addition to what was already said about this in the earlier chapter, the following extract from the incendiary comments made by Joffe once he had returned to Moscow, printed in *Freiheit* on 15 December 1918, can be reproduced:

> In response to the statement of the *Volksbeauftragte* Herr Emil Barth and Herr Hugo Haase, I say in the first instance that I would certainly have been a ridiculous conspirator, and active for nothing in the illegal organisation of Russian Social Democracy for 15 years, if I had acted in my strictly illegal revolutionary activity in Berlin in the way in which it suited the two gentlemen to describe.
>
> It is self-evident that I could not directly hand sums of money intended for buying weapons to Barth directly, since this gentleman was a novice in the workers' movement and did not inspire any great trust in me. Rather, I had to choose such comrades as middlemen who had more claim to my trust and whose names had a better reputation in the workers' movement. But Herr *Volksbeauftragter* Barth was quite aware—as he himself admits—that the several hundred thousand marks that he received from his German comrades ultimately came from me. He confirmed this to me at the meeting between us which he mentioned, fourteen days before the outbreak of the Revolution, when he said he knew precisely where these moneys had their origin.

For their part, the *Spartakus* people took on the Bolshevists' material aid, and gradually also their political doctrine. At a Reich conference held on 7 October 1918 in Gotha, the *Spartakus* League resolved to pursue the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils everywhere in Germany. The

resolution met with the unreserved endorsement and support of Karl Liebknecht, who after his release from penal servitude on 21 October 1918, which Philipp Scheidemann had obtained, took over leadership of the *Spartakus* League. We have seen how in the evening of 9 November 1918 he tried to settle the faction of Independent Social Democracy on the Bolshevist programme of council dictatorship [*Rätediktatur*]; how he called on the workers of Berlin to make this their programme in the *Rote Fahne*-titled issue of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* of 10 November 1918; how he acted in the same way in the great assembly of workers' and soldiers' councils in the evening of 10 November 1918; but how, instead of the motion put forward by his followers to compose the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in such a way that a majority for this plan could be hoped for in it, this was instead composed on the basis of parity between Independents and Majority socialists, whereupon Liebknecht rejected any election into the Executive Council constructed in such a way for himself and for Rosa Luxemburg, who was absent.

But this refusal should not mean that the two of them and the *Spartakus* League intended to submit to the majority decision and remain passive for the time being. On the contrary, they now engaged with great zeal in agitation, which had the purpose of breaking up the parity-socialist government of the new Republic that that assembly had sanctioned—to drive out the "*Scheidemänner*", as the phrase went, that is to say the members of Majority Social Democracy. That, if their plan in Berlin succeeded, this would—in light of the strength of the Majority socialists throughout the country—have had to plunge Germany into a situation of anarchy with all its destructive consequences, Karl Liebknecht and his partisans did not bother to take into consideration. After all, Liebknecht usually exhibited great insouciance about the consequences of his political actions. It was the psychological cause of the great tragic guilt with which he burdened himself in those days.

A politician, and especially a leader of a mass movement, assumes a responsibility with what he does and does not do whereby good intentions by themselves are not enough to rule out any blame for ill effects. One can and must demand of a leader that he seriously and thoroughly considers the effects of actions to which he or his party feel attracted, before he orders or endorses it. Fundamentally one can even posit the categorical imperative: the leader must *know*—namely, know precisely what the likely consequences of his orders will be. If he does not know that, then he is not qualified to be leader, and has already incurred blame by taking over as

responsible a role as that of leader without being up to it. The radical ethicist Magnus Schwantje, who is very close to Karl Liebknecht, explains very fittingly in his work *Should We Respect Every So-Called Honest Conviction?* (Berlin 1920, Verlag Neues Vaterland) that even a man who wanted to do good and imposed heavy sacrifices on himself with this intention, but in fact caused damage because he used the wrong means or did not predict the consequences of his action, cannot be freed of blame on account of error.[1] "Because", Schwantje writes very correctly, "it is possible that he only erred in his choice of means and did not recognise the consequences of his action because he *did not try hard enough* to find the right means to achieve his good purpose, or that his good intentions were mixed with egotistical inclinations, which clouded the impartiality of his reflection".[2] But egotistical inclinations need not necessarily be directed towards gaining material advantages, they also exist where people are accustomed to following their personal sentiments and intuitions indiscriminately without considering the effect on others.

The *Spartakus* League was primarily made up of young people without experience and political judgment, who were joined after the victory of the Revolution by eccentric and dissatisfied elements of the most varied kinds. It had its representatives in a number of factories in Berlin, and these, along with the representatives of its other sections, held shared sessions, publicising the resolutions formulated in these sessions with the signature "The Revolutionary Stewards", without the great mass of the Berlin workers finding out anything more precise about the mandates and the composition of these Revolutionary Stewards.

Quite a few workers were misled in this way. But in extremely ferocious articles in the paper they published, *Die Rote Fahne*, after the eviction of the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, Karl Liebknecht and other leaders of the *Spartakus* League called on their variously assorted followers to arm themselves for a struggle against the government of the Republic that had only just been formed. At their head, amid calls to topple the Majority socialist members of the government, Liebknecht paraded through the streets where the government buildings are located, and to them he and his friends eventually distributed weapons. Where should, where must that have led? Could it have had any other consequence than bloody battles between socialists, to the detriment of the Republic? This is the question Kurt Eisner posed to Liebknecht on 24 November 1918 when he came to the Reich conference of the individual state governments, and remonstrated with him for two hours in a hauntingly enduring conversation about how gravely he

would sin against the great cause that was at stake if he continued to agitate in the way described. But Eisner could move Liebknecht as little as the others to desist from his agitation.

So eventually the unavoidable consequence came about. Already during the night of 21 November 1918, after a gathering at which Liebknecht had spoken, some of these budding hotheads, to whom even the left-Independent chief constable Eichhorn did not seem radical enough, attempted an attack on the police headquarters, in which they shot dead a policeman, although the attempt could be repelled without any other bloodshed. Yet blood did flow in the evening of 6 December 1918. That is the day on which in the afternoon a harebrained member of the soldiers' council, *Feldwebel* [Sergeant] Fischer, egged on by a German-American called Martens, who was known as a gutter journalist, and two younger aristocrats from the Foreign Office, invaded a session of the Executive Council of Workers' Councils with armed men and declared that it was under arrest, since it had made all manner of enemies, while a *Feldwebel* Spiro at the head of some soldiers headed to the Reich Chancellery, called on Fritz Ebert to come out, and challenged him in the name of the multitude that had gathered in the meantime to allow himself to be proclaimed President of the Republic. Faced with the crowd, which was shouting all kinds of things, Ebert gave the stalling answer that he first needed to discuss the matter with his colleagues in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, and ordered the immediate release of the Executive Council, thereby putting an end to the *putsch*, which was harmless in its empty-headedness. But it had a terrible aftermath.

Perhaps not quite coincidentally, it had been staged at the same time as gatherings of deserters, the war-disabled, soldiers on leave, and the unemployed, organised by the *Spartakus* League, took place in the North and Northeast of Berlin. In these gatherings of elements who were particularly easy to rouse to unconsidered actions, for whom their own organisations and "councils" had been formed, the news was announced about the apparent dissolution of the Executive Council, which, along with the appropriate comments by the speakers, put the participants into a not inconsiderable rage. They resolved immediately to hold counter-demonstrations, secured permission from chief constable Emil Eichhorn to, as they later claimed, hold unarmed processions, and got these on their way. But before the troops had formed up, the soldier Krebs, member of the soldiers' council at military headquarters, was notified by telephone by a member of the Berlin Soldiers' Council that the participants in the

deserters' gatherings intended to hold demonstrations at the end of their gatherings "to force through their demands with armed force". Krebs dutifully reported this to the headquarters, which was headed by the Majority socialist Otto Wels, and which, since it had just received the news about the attempted suspension of the Executive Council shortly beforehand, so that it had to believe that it was dealing simultaneously with a *putsch* attempt from right and left, and since it had not been informed about the arrangement with the chief constable, gave the order to bar the roads to the government quarter, through which the processions of demonstrators wanted to pass. Since the main gathering of *Spartakus* people took place in the *Germaniasäle* on Chausseestraße in the North of Berlin, troops of the regiment of the *Garde*-Fusiliers (called "May bugs" in Berlin slang), whose barracks were in the same street, were charged with carrying out the order.

The procession that was leaving the *Germaniasäle*, which wanted to move West through the Invalidenstraße, which crossed the Chausseestraße, allowed itself to be dispersed without serious resistance. But not so a procession that was advancing from a gathering that had been held in the *Sophiensäle* in the Sophienstraße, which belonged to the Northern Centre of Berlin, from the direction of the *Oranienburger Tor* through the Southern part of the Chausseestraße towards the Invalidenstraße. Having reached it, it was also halted by the *Garde*-Fusiliers and called on to disperse, but it resisted, and so it came to shooting, to which no fewer than 16 dead, 12 heavily injured, and a number of lightly injured fell victim. Who gave the order to shoot, specifically which side actually started the attack, has not been established. The soldiers, who had the strict order only to use weapons in the case of extreme self-defence, claimed that they had first been shot at from among the ranks of the demonstrators, and since they too had some wounded, that does not lie outside the realm of possibility. In point of fact, chief constable Eichhorn had allowed weapons to be handed out to these demonstrators. Naturally, it is also possible that during the exchange of words with the demonstrators one of the soldiers had fired the first shot.

This tragic event provoked not inconsiderable uproar. All those who cared about the consolidation and progressive development of the democratic Republic could only regret this in the deepest way. The press of the bourgeois-republican parties and the organs of the Social-Democratic Party also expressed this sentiment. The bourgeois papers added that it would probably not have come to this shooting if the gov-

ernment had a well-organised protective force behind it, and unambiguously indicated that it was firmly determined to meet riots with it. By contrast, the leaders of the *Spartakus* party immediately laid all the blame for the clash on the social democrats in the government. So the *Rote Fahne* wrote on 7 December 1918:

> Workers! Soldiers! Comrades! Fourteen bodies lie on the pavement in Berlin! Defenceless, peaceful soldiers, brought down by cowardly and treacherous murder! Hold responsible those who are to blame for this bloody crime! Sweep away from the government those who are truly to blame, the infamous rabble-rousers, those who delude the unenlightened mass of soldiers, Wels, Ebert, Scheidemann, and their comrades! Their names have now become the battle-cry of the counter-revolution, the battle-standard of anarchy and fratricide, to the banner of high treason against the Revolution! Energy! Solidarity, firmness! We must act! The bloody crime must be avenged, the conspiracy of Wels-Ebert-Scheidemann must be brought down with an iron fist, the Revolution must be saved. Down with Wels-Ebert-Scheidemann and their comrades! All power to the workers' and soldiers' councils! To work! To the barricades! To battle! Down with the bloodstained, cowardly instigators of the *putsch*! Up the Revolution!

By contrast, *Vorwärts* held the "unconscionable activity of the *Spartakus* people" and the "enormous embitterment of nine-tenths of the Berlin soldiers against this activity" responsible for the bloody clash. It rejected from the outset the claim that the government was allowing the people to be shot at with the remark that "the people had shot at the people" in the Chausseestraße, since the soldiers who assured them that they had indeed found themselves in need of self-defence "were the people as well after all". The organ of the Independents, *Freiheit*, initially wrote more along the lines of the *Rote Fahne*, that the military authorities that had sent the soldiers out onto the streets were to be held responsible for the bloodshed above all, and demanded "ruthless, rapid investigation and punishment of those responsible, all of them, to set an example". Besides this, it laid part of the blame onto the "baiting" allegedly carried out by *Vorwärts* and the bourgeois press against Liebknecht and his followers. An arrant inversion of the facts of the matter. Since so far as there had been baiting here, it was mostly only the echo of the incitement of the workers to violently topple the government carried on unremittingly in the *Rote Fahne*. But *Freiheit* found itself in an intermediate position, in which it believed it could secure influence over the more brutal elements by aligning its language as far as

possible with the extreme left. In fact, however, by doing so it only advanced the latter's work all the more, while reaping only their scornful ridicule.

But this time matters did not rest there. In the evening edition on Monday, 9 December 1918, *Freiheit* published a note in which it observed with satisfaction that speculation in the bourgeois press about a conflict between the cabinet, i.e., the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, and the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils brought about on the basis of the events of 6 December had proven to be deceptive. In the debate that had taken place on Sunday 7 December, "all lingering questions had been cleared up". The note reads:

> In particular it was established that Ebert and Scheidemann had known nothing of the *putsch* attempt, and were surprised by it. One may expect that through this debate a common basis has been found on which fruitful collaboration can take place between the revolutionary authorities, the government and the Executive Council.

This correction was self-evidently not to the liking of the *Rote Fahne*. In its edition of 10 December, it wrote:

> So the Independent organ is triumphant and jubilant, that the alleged hope of the bourgeoisie for a conflict between the cabinet and the Executive Council, read: between the *Scheidemänner* and the Independents, was disdainfully disappointed. *Freiheit* is triumphant that the *Scheidemänner* and the Independents have again patched things up.
>
> The 14 bodies in the Chausseestraße, the Friday *putsch*, were only a passing cloud in the blue sky of harmony between the Haase-people and the organisers of the counter-revolutionary subversion and the bloodbath. They lie in each other's arms, and *Freiheit*, beaming with joy, proclaims that "a common basis has been found" on which "fruitful collaboration" can take place between the Independents and the *Scheidemänner*!
>
> And that says the same *Freiheit* that printed the letter by Hermann Gräber, the member of the Soldiers' Council, in which it is shown on record that Ebert was informed of the coup from beginning to end, and that he withheld the relevant protocol from his man Haase.
>
> That says the same *Freiheit* that printed Wels' declaration about the cordoning-off of the Chausseestraße, in which Wels admits to have given the order for the bloodbath.
>
> That says the same *Freiheit* that described the wide and convoluted counter-revolutionary plot by *Wels-Marten*.

> It says that at a moment where counter-revolutionary officers are marching to Berlin at the head of stoked-up troops from the front to "bring order".
>
> After all that, we can formulate the "common basis" that was "found" for the "fruitful collaboration" between the Independents and the *Scheidemänner* as clear as daylight.
>
> This "common basis" is:
>
> deliberately obscuring the actual source of counter-revolutionary conspiracies,
>
> consciously misleading the masses about who is truly to blame for the bloodbath of 6 December,
>
> systematically practising political corruption and further rabble-rousing against the *Spartakus* League,
>
> with the eventual strangulation of the Revolution as its final result.
>
> This is the "common basis". It stands on a bloody foundation. Haase-Ebert now shake hands over the fourteen bodies in the Chausseestraße.
>
> We repeat: what was *lack of political principle before* 6 December, is *lack of political honour after* it.

No more than Otto Wels had given the order for a bloodbath, as can be seen from what was said before, no more does the report of the Soldiers' Council member Hermann Gräber, to which the *Rote Fahne* is referring, indicate that Ebert was informed about the *putsch* attempt at all. There, Gräber only recounted that, after the *Marine-Landwehr*-Division, to which he belonged, had been called on by a certain Echtmann on 6 December to take part in an armed action to arrest the Executive Council, remove the Haase government, and have Ebert declared President, he and his comrades had been tasked by their division to go to the Reich Chancellery to inform the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* about the plan. But since the cabinet happened to be in session at the time, they were not allowed in. In Gräber's report, it says:

> We then gave the entire plan on record to the private secretaries Moser and Brecht, whereupon Moser answered that he would go to *Volksbeauftragter* Ebert. We had then waited there for about an hour when the reply came, apparently from Ebert, that a peaceful demonstration was planned *unanimously in favour of the Ebert-Haase government*, and they impressed on us that it was also desirable for us *Landflieger* to take part in it.

Gräber continues that he had thereupon tried once again to ascertain by telephone whether the demonstration that Echtmann had told them

about would be armed or unarmed, and when he received the answer that led him to conclude the former, he informed the aforementioned secretary Moser about this, who then gave him his word of honour that he would ensure that even the *Garde* sappers would come unarmed. The next day, he, Gräber, had discussed all of these things with *Volksbeauftragter* Haase, and that in response to the latter's question, Ebert stated that he had known nothing about any of this.

According to this, it emerges from Gräber's report that he *assumed* that the reply which secretary Moser gave him originally came from Ebert. He does not know exactly from whom the reply came, he does not even know whether Moser was even able to speak to Ebert, who was tied up in a cabinet session, and present the protocol to him. And this statement, which carefully avoids any direct accusation against Ebert, is reinterpreted by the *Rote Fahne* into "evidence on record that Ebert was informed of the coup from beginning to end" and had "withheld" the relevant protocol from his colleague Haase. Not satisfied with that, the paper managed to write later on in the same issue: "Ebert, the violent brute [*Gewaltmensch*], his hands still dripping from the bloodbath in the Chausseestraße…".

The *Rote Fahne* bore in its title the statement: "Editors Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg". Both of these had the education that allows us to judge the import of our words very carefully, and Liebknecht as a trained jurist could not possibly be unclear about the fact that that interpretation of *Flieger* Gräber's account amounted to the worst kind of sophistry, which is condemned by jurisprudence as dishonourable. It is even less possible to assume naïve error here, since no even tolerably sensible purpose can be discovered for whose sake Ebert could have been induced to facilitate the *putsch* by Spiro and his comrades. This *putsch* would, even if it had immediately succeeded—whereby nothing would as yet have been achieved outside of Berlin—have placed Ebert in the most uncomfortable position imaginable. However, even according to Gräber's account, in the Reich Chancellery, secretary Moser had asked him and his comrades to let the *Ebert-Haase* government survive. The version by the *Rote Fahne* was a web of *untruths*, dictated by the intention to incite as great a part of the workers of Berlin as possible against the representatives of the Social-Democratic Party in the government.

Sadly this kind of political campaign did not remain without success. By continually repeating the accusation, they managed to convince a growing number of members of the working class of the opinion that a *putsch* had truly been undertaken against the radical socialists with Ebert's foreknowl-

edge, and that Wels had unconscionably, if not with premeditation, let troops shoot at unarmed demonstrators. More and more dissatisfied workers flocked to the "Liebknecht Party", in whose gatherings sounded the wildest maledictions against the "traitorous *Scheidemänner*".

It came about at that time that the author of this work happened to meet a Russian socialist who he knew, and who had joined Liebknecht's group, in the tram, and expressed bitter reservations to her about their activities, which by all political estimation could only cause harm. She replied to my remonstrations by pointing to the daily growth in Liebknecht's following, whereupon I countered that popularity in times of such fomenting proved nothing whatsoever for the rightness of any agitation. Without having reached an agreement, we had already parted ways when this comrade came up to me once more and quietly said to me in a voice filled with emotion: "You have no idea what kinds of proposals they make to us, *we are often horrified ourselves*!"

With that, she said nothing that could surprise me. Every extreme agitation attracts all kinds of people who have lost their psychological balance for some reason or other, and now gush about the most fantastical or most brutal plans, as the case may be. It was the pride of the founders of Social Democracy to have equipped it with the intellectual armaments to make it weatherproof against the influence of such desperados. But every time a group steps outside the path they showed, it had to give those elements increasingly greater weight in their counsel. So if all the same not all the proposals by fanatics and adventurers aimed at neutralising the Majority socialists met with the endorsement of Liebknecht and his comrades, then the *leitmotiv* of their agitation work still remained to build an army of eccentrics [*Heer von Exaltierten*] out of those who were dissatisfied with the course of the Revolution that was capable, at a given time of confusion, of using violence to place itself in control of political power. But for a movement that is being steered onto this path, once it comes to action there is no stopping it anymore.

Certainly, it did not come to this in Berlin. But it would soon become clear how close that possibility came. On 14 December 1918, the delegate elections took place in Berlin for the general Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils scheduled for 16 December. The opponents of the continued existence of the social-democratic coalition and the policy they had embarked on understandably deployed everything they could to bring about the election of opposition people, whereby however they stuck less to the facts than that they accused those they were campaigning against of

the most despicable intentions. One example is the commentary with which the *Rote Fahne* accompanied the announcement of the draft order of business for the Congress. This order was as follows:

1. *Reports*
   a) of the Executive Committee. Speaker: *Richard Müller*;
   b) of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. (The speaker was W. Dittmann.)
2. *Nationalversammlung* or council constitution? Speaker: *Cohen-Reuß*, discussant: *Däumig*.
3. Socialisation of economic life. Speaker: *Hilferding*; (The discussant was supposed to be Rosa *Luxemburg*, but she declined with the argument that if the question of the *Nationalversammlung* had already been settled beforehand, her speech would no longer serve any purpose.)
4. Effect of the peace settlement on the domestic situation in the Republic. Speaker: *Ledebour*.
5. Election of the Executive Committee of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.

About this, the *Rote Fahne* wrote in its edition of 10 December:

> Significant in this order of business are two things: *first*, the formulation of the central problem of the Revolution as an alternative: *Nationalversammlung or* council constitution. Here at least it is openly admitted that a *Nationalversammlung* is tantamount to the destruction of the workers' and soldiers' councils and their political role.
>
> *Second*, the fact that *only* the Executive Council is to be subjected to a new election by the Reich parliament of w and s councils [*A- und S-Räte*]. The political cabinet, the gentlemen Ebert-Haase, who received their power from precisely the same source as the Executive Council, namely from the Berlin W and S Council, do not think of submitting themselves to the ratification or new election by the organ of the w and s councils of the entire Reich! Ebert-Haase think that they stand *above* the Reich parliament of the workers and soldiers of Germany! The central council of the w and s councils is robbed by the *Scheidemänner* of its highest decisive power before it has even met. And these people talk of "democracy"!
>
> Will the w and s councils of all of Germany put up with this assault on their political power?

In reality, the order of business had not been drawn up by the Haase-Ebert government, but by the Berlin Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, in which the Independents had achieved a dominant position. Hence only one of the predetermined speakers—Cohen-Reuß—had been selected from the Social-Democratic Party, but all the others from the Party of the Independents. The election of an Executive Council had to be placed on the order of business, since the Berlin Executive Council had only temporarily exercised the office of Executive Council for the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of all of Germany, since that was still yet to be elected. And thirdly, the question posed as *Nationalversammlung* or council constitution did not mean whether there should be any workers' and soldiers' councils at all, but rather whether they exclusively should rule Germany. The word council constitution [*Räteverfassung*] could not mean anything else. In every respect, the commentary by the *Rote Fahne* consists of suspicions that have no basis in reality. Anybody who looks more closely must realise that without further ado, but there were enough people who let themselves be influenced by this dialectic.

Nonetheless, it did not prevent the delegate elections in Berlin from still resulting in a majority for the Social-Democratic Party. The vote took place on the basis of lists according to a proportional electoral system, and the parties received the following votes in the workers' councils:

The list of the Social-Democratic Party	349
The list of the Independents	281
The list of liberal professions	79.

The elections for the soldiers' councils in Berlin were even more favourable for the old Social Democracy. There its list received 204 votes, but that of the Independents only 121.

That, however, was still not much compared to the outcome of the elections in the rest of Germany. There, as would become clear at the Congress, they resulted in an overall majority for the old party vis-à-vis the Independents of more than 8 to 1.

On the day before the Congress convened, the general assembly of the Association of Independent Social Democrats of Berlin took place in the *Pharussäle*. It had to take a stance on the questions that lay before the Congress, and in the middle of which lay the question of the convocation of a national assembly. It was already outlined above that differences of

opinion about this obtained in the camp of this party. No accommodation had been reached about this within the Independents' faction, so that on the advice of the author of this work they ultimately agreed to leave this decision to the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Hugo Haase, who held the introductory speech on the political situation, outlined this to the assembly. He confessed that he himself shared the view of those who wanted to wait with elections until March 1919, but expressed the worry that the Congress would decide in favour of the proposal to schedule the elections already for 19 January, which he found too early. Should this happen, they would however have to acquiesce to this, since the *Nationalversammlung* was an inevitable necessity, and the party had to do everything to be as strongly represented within it as possible. How far off this still was in Berlin, the result of the election for delegates from the workers' councils to the Congress had shown, which had fallen behind their expectations to a frightening degree. The party could not possibly join in the policy of the *Spartakus* people, and it had to energetically prevent the *Spartakus* people from forming an organisation within the party in order to campaign against it from inside. He had already protested against this in 1917 at the conference in Gotha, and he now repeated that he found it better if Independents and *Spartakus* people separated.

Rosa Luxemburg, who held the opposing speech, confronted him with barbed attacks on his policy, which in her view were to blame for the defeat in Berlin. She argued that it was outrageous that the Independents had not left the government immediately after the events of 6 December, and laid a resolution before the assembly which demanded their immediate resignation and the immediate takeover of all political power by the workers' and soldiers' councils, as well as granting their Executive Council the highest state authority, and rejected the convocation of the *Nationalversammlung* as counter-revolutionary. After various speakers had spoken for and against, this resolution was defeated by 195 to 485 votes, the latter going to a resolution that declared the organisation of elections for a *Nationalversammlung* to be the most important political task of a party that regarded itself as the bearer of the Revolution and its progressive force, and was willing to fulfil all the obligations that might arise from this.

A supplementary resolution, adopted almost unanimously, opposed any alliance with the Majority socialists in the election.

The Haase-Luxemburg altercation was the prelude to an even harsher clash between Independents and Spartacists at the Congress of Workers'

and Soldiers' Councils that began the next day. To understand the struggles that played out there, the following remark may also be made.

Strong frictions had gradually emerged between the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* and the Berlin Executive Council. The Executive Council, which by convention from the first days of the Revolution was supposed to hold office as the temporary Central Council for the workers' and soldiers' councils of Germany, had given this office a very far-reaching interpretation regarding its role as the entity exercising political control over the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. By including representatives from other parts of Germany, it had raised its number of members from 26 to 45, and taken on a composition in which the partisans of the extreme left became ever more dominant. It believed it should exert a kind of censorship over the individual measures of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, and that it had the right for its part to be able to go over its head in making decisions that in the view of the *Volksbeauftragte* belonged to their remit. That would have had to lead to misunderstandings even in the case of agreement about the main questions of policy, but since much was lacking in this regard, had as a result all the more mutual irritation.

One object of dispute was, among other things, the question of oversight over the economic conduct of the local workers' and soldiers' councils. These did not prove themselves universally successful by any stretch. In a whole series of localities, they provided highly valuable services to the Republic by exercising well-organised control over public property (stores of war materiel and the like). But in other places they degenerated into costly clubs in which there was much talk but few sensible things were done, but rather all kinds of damage was caused by interfering in the affairs of the local administration, which they did not properly understand. As a result, there were many complaints about the waste of public means and ruinous infringements of communal administrations by the workers' and soldiers' councils, and if there was also no shortage of malicious exaggerations in this, which were then deliberately generalised by the press of the enemies of the Republic, then still not all complaints rested on untruths, and the government and especially its financial administration had to find itself prompted the inspect the councils' financial conduct more closely, and not to accede to every demand for money from them without further ado. In many cases, that created an oppositional mood against the government among the councils, which had to stand the Executive Council—which acted as the councils' advocate towards the government—in very good stead.

Unpleasant tensions had also emerged between the government and the divisions and representatives of the *Marine* troops who were stationed in Berlin. Apart from the soldiers and marines who had come to Berlin in the days of the November uprising, in mid-November 600 *Marine* troops had been dispatched from Cuxhaven to Berlin at the request of the Berlin city commander Otto Wels, and partly put up in the old *Königsschloss*, but mainly in the former *Marstall*. They adopted the name *Volksmarinedivision* [People's Navy Division], and were supposed to act as a kind of reserve troop for the Republic, since it was believed that that they could be especially relied on due to the positive experiences made with them in Kiel. But the opposite happened. Since the *Schloss* contained many things of great value, the troops housed there had to submit to restrictive regulations, which they found uncomfortable and which made them all the more receptive to being influenced by opposition elements, since the majority of them were political novices and were exposed to the most confused beliefs about the meaning of the revolutionary slogans that were preached to them. Insufficiently thorough political education also dominated a conference of delegates from the various soldiers' councils of the *Marine*, held somewhat later in Wilhelmshaven, which ended with the nomination of a central council consisting of 53 members, which took the name *Oberster Marinerat* [Supreme Navy Council], and had the task of exerting control over the proceedings in the *Marine* and taking the reins of the unified leadership and reform of the *Marine*. It relocated to Berlin, installed itself in the Reich *Marine* Office, from its centre there formed subdivisions for the Office's various areas of work, and repeatedly intervened high-handedly in its administration, which naturally provoked not inconsiderable indignation in the ranks of its trained officials, and resulted in all manner of confusion in the Office's business.

When Gustav Noske, then still governor of Kiel, temporarily came to Berlin at the start of December 1918, and wanted to take part in a session of this *Oberster Marinerat* in his capacity as Assistant to the *Marine* Ministry, the chairman first called a vote on whether Noske was even allowed to attend the session at all, which was approved. They discussed the council's authority to exert power, and it was proposed that the *Marinerat* should sit as a "parliament of the *Marine*", which independently regulated all *Marine* affairs, formed its resolutions at its own discretion, and left it to the government whether or not to come to terms with that. To Noske's objection that the *Marinerat* had no right to infringe the executive power of the government, a member retorted that the council

was acting out of its own revolutionary right as the highest authority of the *Marine*. Noske, who recounts this in his work *From Kiel to Kapp*, adds that he had remained in the minority and had thereupon left the session.[3]

Undoubtedly he was in the right about this, this was not the way in which to carry out the democratisation of administration. Further, as Noske points out at another point in his work, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* had previously told him that it knew nothing about the work of the 53-man council, in no way endorsed the creation of such a body, and instructed him to proceed accordingly.

But it is another question whether Noske struck the tone that the general situation required in his altercation with that 53-man council. He writes himself that some of the members were reasonable people, but with others one had to make allowances for their political inexperience, and so it came down less to insisting on political rights than referring to political necessity, which always allows one to insert a conciliatory aspect into the rejection of unjustified claims. But Noske seems to have fallen somewhat short in doing so, so that this exchange contributed to adding new fuel for the anti-government agitation among the *Marine* troops. Even if this agitation did not succeed in fracturing the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, in which one could predict that the opposition elements would be in the minority, given the result of the delegate elections throughout the country, then it still succeeded in mustering a greater array of demonstrators against it than it was thought capable of given the strength of its fundamental membership.

Notes

1. Magnus Schwantje (1877–1959), German author and pacifist, radical ethicist and early advocate of vegetarianism and animal rights.
2. [op. cit. pp. 4–5]
3. Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp* (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1920).

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CHAPTER 11

The First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Germany

The great effect that the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils had on the later progression of the Revolution, and the insight that its eventful course offers into the surging battles of ideas in the Revolution, make it advisable to dwell on it somewhat longer.

Slightly over 500 representatives of workers' and soldiers' councils had gathered for the meeting of the first parliament of the German Revolution, as the Congress had been called, on 16 December 1918 in the Prussian House of Representatives in Berlin, which had been reserved for it. Yet ultimately only 442 mandates were recognised as valid. The first session was opened in the morning of that day at 10 o'clock with welcoming speeches by Richard *Müller* for the Berlin Executive Council and Fritz *Ebert* for the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. The Congress elected a bureau composed equally of a Majority socialist—*Leinert*-Hanover—one Independent socialist—*Seeger*-Leipzig—and one soldiers' representative—*Gomolka*, but rejected with an overwhelming majority in two votes the motion tabled by some delegates to include Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in the sessions as guests with advisory votes. This majority was evidently prompted by the fact that the *Rote Fahne* edited by Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg had published an appeal to the Berlin workers that morning in bold lettering, which called on them to launch a demonstration strike in misleading language. It read:

> Today, Monday, a large mass demonstration! Workers of Berlin! Comrades! Out of the factories! We must give the Central Council of the Workers' and

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> Soldiers' Councils of Germany a worthy welcome. We must express the determined revolutionary will of the Berlin proletariat. Out onto the streets!

While workers who were unfamiliar with the situation could believe that this was really about a rally in favour of the Congress, it was clear to anybody who knew the facts of the matter that something completely different was being planned here. For none of the major political organisations of the workers, no trade union had anything whatsoever to do with this demonstration. It had been arranged behind the backs of the appointed leaders of these organisations—apparently to put as large a number of workers as possible into the field for a cause that lay far from their minds.

Up to a certain degree, that also succeeded. Partly through persuasion, but already partly by applying means of compulsion, the *Spartakus* people ensured that a number of larger and smaller plants ceased work on the morning of 16 December 1918, and a many-thousand-strong crowd gathered in the Siegesallee by the Tiergarten, where they formed up for a procession through the city, which swelled in size on the way to the House of Representatives, so that eventually it may have numbered not 250,000 people, as the *Rote Fahne* later wrote, but probably between 50 and 60,000. From the ledge of the House of Representatives, Paul Levi and Karl Liebknecht held speeches to the crowd, now with an open declaration of war against the "*Scheidemänner*" and the *Nationalversammlung*. "Before the House of Representatives, as Liebknecht spoke to the crowd from the high ledge", it said the next day in the *Rote Fahne*, "how the masses hailed every one of his words, how the cheers roared for the social Revolution, for power to the workers' and soldiers' councils, how the calls thundered 'Down with the *Scheidemänner*!' That was the voice of the working people of Berlin."

The latter was, as would soon become clear, a crass exaggeration. From several factories came insistent protests by the workers denying that they had wanted to demonstrate against the *Nationalversammlung*.

A deputation dispatched by the leaders of the demonstrators to the Congress submitted to it, as the chair of the deputation declared, the following demands "on behalf of the revolutionary workers of Berlin, which is demonstrating today, and with numbers of at least 250,000 people" (which was met with lively shouts of "oh, really?"):

1. Germany to be a free socialist Republic.
2. All power to the workers' and soldiers' councils.

3. The Executive Council nominated by the Central Council is the true organ of legislation and executive force, so that the *Volksbeauftragte* too are to be appointed and removed by the Executive Council.
4. Removal of the *Volksbeauftragte* Ebert-Haase.
5. Energetic implementation of all measures required to protect the Revolution by the Central Council, especially disarmament of the counterrevolution and formation of the Red Guard.
6. Appeal by the Central Council to the proletarians of all countries to form workers' and soldiers' councils and to world revolution.

Points 4 and 5 were answered by the majority of the Congress with tumultuous shouts of protest, which were repeated at the end.

When the noise had died down, Chairman Leinert told the deputation that it could explain to the workers outside that the Congress had acknowledged their demands and would decide about them in its discussions.

With that, the incident in the hall was over. Outside, after it had been reported to them that the demands had been read out, part of the demonstrators moved on to Friedrichshain, to the burial-place of those who had fallen in March 1848.

As exaggerated as the *Rote Fahne*'s jubilation was about the scale of the demonstration, it was still justified in boasting about one achievement for the *Spartakus* League. Regardless of the means whereby it was achieved, and of how its value was to be estimated for the movement as a whole, it was still an undeniable fact that greater masses of workers than had been expected had followed the League's call, which could only have an emboldening effect on its followers. The majority of people in popular movements are subject to a law of gravitation, which pulls them where the greatest mass has gathered. For many thousands of workers who were judging things emotionally, the *Spartakus* League had enhanced its prestige.

After all, it did not give up its cause as lost either whatsoever. On 18 December, another deputation sent by it, numbering some 50 people, appeared again in the House of Representatives, and demanded to be let in and given a hearing by the Congress, otherwise 250,000 workers would lay down their work. Although the Congress resolved by more than 400 votes to barely a dozen not to admit them, since it was meeting not just for Berlin but for all of Germany and did not want to waste its time, the deputation barged into the meeting hall with flags and placards, and when

Chairman Leinert after a brief exchange of words, referring to the resolution that had been agreed, requested that they leave the chamber in the interest of the common cause of the working class, its spokesman Haller, without having been given the floor by him, launched into an address to the Congress, which was met by it with vehement shouts of "quiet!", so that his voice was drowned out, which he and some of his companions answered with even louder shouts in reply. To put an end to this embarrassing scene, Leiner ultimately proposed to make an exception once more and to let the spokesman have his say to make a short speech about the deputation's concerns. He began by declaring that this was about a revolutionary right, and that in the French revolution the tribunes had repeatedly intervened in the deliberations of the Convent, and then read out again the demands "from 250,000 workers" that had already been delivered on the 16th. He added that this naturally meant "Down with the *Nationalversammlung* and all power to the councils", and wanted to keep speaking, but was interrupted by the chairman, who indicated that the Congress would acknowledge these demands and now had to insist that its work not be disturbed any further. Amid an exchange of words with the delegates Barth and Ledebour, and with shouts of "Here too reaction reigns!" and "Here the workers' interests are not being represented!", the deputation departed, and even if among the *Spartakus* people gathered outside the chamber far stronger curses sounded about the Congress, and Karl Liebknecht after a few reports exclaimed that it was "time to put an end to the whole nuisance of this Congress", they still shied away from summoning the masses again. Now, where its purpose had been clear from the start, all probability spoke in favour of a major flop.

The Congress was disturbed in a different way from among the ranks of the soldiers. In the session of 17 December, about 30 soldiers appeared in the session hall in the afternoon, carrying the emblems of the regiments which they claimed to represent, and stood behind the speakers' platform on both sides of the president's chair, whereupon their spokesman went up to the lectern and read out the following resolution as the "unanimous resolution of a gathering of soldiers' councils and military formations in Berlin":

> Just as before, we are at the disposal of the current government, so the government in whose programme lie the goals of a socialist Republic as its ultimate aims. The comrades of the *Marine* are the first bearers and protectors of the Revolution, their presence is therefore absolutely required. The

soldiers' councils request that the Congress immediately resolves the following urgent motion:

1. The *Oberster Soldatenrat* [Supreme Soldiers' Council], comprising delegates of all soldiers' councils, exercises command over all the troops of the *Heer*, and likewise with the *Marine*.
2. The badges of rank for all service grades are banned. All officers are to be disarmed. The ban on badges of rank and all service grades will apply to the returning troops after they have laid down arms in their barracks.
3. The soldiers' councils are responsible for the reliability of troop divisions and the maintenance of discipline.

The detachment asked that this resolution be immediately passed as an urgent request. Chairman Seeger (Independent) declares this to be impossible, and a delegate of the front soldiers too, Dorrenbach, who otherwise expressed their friendly greeting to the troops at home, and assured them that he and his comrades would defend their interests as far as possible, asked them to give up on an immediate adoption of their resolution, as it contained points that needed to be considered carefully. The Independents Heckert and Ledebour objected to this, and the latter's remark that it was especially important to shield the sailors from the rabble-rousing that was being carried out against them by *Volksbeauftragter* Landsberg provoked tumultuous protests from the Majority socialists. A racket breaks out that goes on for minutes, and a terrible uproar that will not die down. A great number of Majority socialists leave the chamber at the suggestion of their party chairman Severing, and are accompanied on their way out by jeers from the radicals and loud cursing from the soldiers in the chamber and on the platform who had lost any sense of reflection. After the noise had lasted for a while, the chairman of the Independent Social Democrats Hugo *Haase* attempted to bring about calm through words of mediation. He says that the excitement on both sides is understandable, and promises the soldiers that their motion would be addressed as quickly as possible. But when he adds that this cannot take place without prior debate, loud objections sound immediately from the soldiers. Even his proposal to discuss the motion as the first point on the next day, given the impossibility of continuing that session, is condemned by them as a delaying tactic that they could not put up with, and is also challenged by Georg Ledebour with great agitation. But amid continuing protests by the soldiers it is brought to a vote by Chairman Seeger and accepted, with only a small minority against, whereupon again the extreme left start making great noise, the chairman swiftly closes the session, some of the soldiers shake

their fists and others swing about them with long sticks they had brought along, and the chamber only slowly clears.

Overnight, people had the chance to calm down, and in the session of 18 December, the soldiers' detachment showed itself to be significantly more accommodating. It had become known that at least part of its members did not even have the regiments they claimed to represent behind them at all, and several delegations of the front soldiers opposed their demeanour, and showed that part of their demands had already been carried out in the provinces, but others were already for technical reasons not to be carried out overnight. So they declared themselves prepared to negotiate, and a commission selected to discuss their motion came to some unanimously accepted resolutions, as *Volksbeauftragter* Hugo Haase was able to share in his report that afternoon, which the Congress then likewise unanimously endorsed. The most important of them are:

1. Supreme command over *Heer* and *Marine* is exercised by the *Volksbeauftragte* under the control of the Executive Council.
2. As a symbol of the smashing to pieces of militarism … the removal of all badges of rank is decreed and the bearing of arms off duty banned.
3. The soldiers' councils are responsible for the reliability of troop divisions and the maintenance of discipline. There are no longer any superiors off duty.
4. Soldiers elect their leaders themselves. Previous officers who enjoy the confidence of the majority of their troop divisions may be reelected.
5. The abolition of the standing *Heer* and the establishment of the *Volkswehr* [People's Defence Force] are to be expedited.

With that, this matter was formally settled. It only remains to mention that in the discussion, Gustav Noske also took the floor in his capacity as Assistant, and opposed the suggestion that had been made that he agreed with the plans of the 53-man committee that called itself the *Oberster Marinerat*. This committee was spending a large part of its time on political questions, and thereby the practical work of the *Marine* Office was being short-changed. Intolerable delays were taking place on important matters. Things that affected the negotiations of an armistice at sea had remained unresolved for days because a member of the committee, whose signature was necessary, did not appear at the Office for three days. The

delegate *Pfaff* from the Kiel Soldiers' Council seconded this. He and his comrades also, he explained, found the apparatus of 53 heads for the committee far too large, they had not received any directives yet from it at all, but had done everything under their own initiative. They had included the officers as consultant advisors and put them in the right areas.

The city commander of Kiel did nothing without their assent, and they had confidence in Noske that he would not be taken to the cleaners by the Admiral. By contrast, in the session on the 19th, a member of the 53-man committee rejected Noske's remarks as inaccurate, and declared that the *Marine* had to decide about reducing the size of the committee, and not this Congress. A remarkable view, whose logic signified the autocracy of an individual organ over the collective body—but one that reveals the prevailing confusion of people's minds and shows what the Republic was in for in the case of conflict.

These were the incidents that were inflicted on the Congress from outside. The debates over the questions that made up its order of business were almost uniformly shaped by the struggle of the extreme left of Social Democracy, influenced by the *Spartakus* League, against the social-democratic governing coalition, or rather specifically the radical majority of the Berlin Executive Council against the cabinet of the Republic. Executive Council against the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*—that was the signature of the dispute, which recalls the vicious struggles that played out repeatedly in France between the Paris Town Hall and the central government. It was introduced with the report by the chairman of the Executive Council, Richard Müller, about its activities.[1] Müller, who for many years had been leader of the opposition within the Berlin local chapter of the German Metalworkers' Association against its leadership developed a fanatical streak during the Revolution. In a session of the Executive Council he had shouted that the way to the *Nationalversammlung* would only go over his dead body [*Leiche*], which earned him the nickname "*Leichenmüller*" among his adversaries. His speech, which he began with the words that it was impossible for him to give his report objectively, was a passionate *j'accuse* against the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. He denounced it for having resisted and opposed at every opportunity the endeavours of the Executive Council to secure the achievements of the Revolution and carry them over into practice, and accused it of having done nothing to replace the reactionary elements in Reich and other offices with people who were on the side of change. The same was the case with the *Heer* leadership and administration. The soldiers who had returned from the

front had been sworn not to the socialist Republic, but merely to the Republic *tout court*, not to the Executive Council, which after all represented the sovereignty of the people through the workers' and soldiers' councils, but to the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. Further, he complained bitterly about the fierce attacks that had been hurled at the Executive Council in gatherings and in the press, even though it had recruited members from the entire Reich, now consisted of 45 rather than 26 members, and had constituted itself as the highest Reich authority in order to prevent *putsch* attempts against the achievements of the Revolution. These attacks for the most part stemmed from military types who had been elected to the Executive Council by soldiers' councils but, because they—especially Captain Colin-Roß—had become a burden through their high-handedness and busybodyish behaviour, had been given the chop. They had circulated the most nonsensical rumours about alleged wastes of money by the Executive Council, rambled about 800 million marks while its entire expenditures in six weeks had run to only 500,000 marks, including the costs of journeys to prevent the squandering of millions' worth of *Heer* property. The *putsch* of 6 December had been the fruit of these libels. There had been animated arguments about it with the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* because of its behaviour on this occasion, since the *putsch* had come from the right, the one on the left had not been nearly as bad. The instigators of the *putsch* on the right had been investigated and arrested by the Executive Council, but they had all been set free again—the main culprit, a Captain Lorenz, directly at the request of the War Ministry. The Executive Council had repeatedly demanded that Dr. Solf and Eduard David, who had attempted to prove Germany's innocence in the world war, be removed from the Foreign Office, but had run into the resistance of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* again and again, so that the compromised officials were able to burn the greater part of the incriminating material. As a result, the Executive Council had had to fight with both natural and unnatural enemies, and now it was handing over the fate of the Revolution to the Congress with the wish that this might safeguard and further expand the achievements of the Revolution.

While Müller was still speaking, the emissaries of the *Spartakus* demonstration had appeared and had demanded to be listened to immediately, whereby his speech was interrupted and could only be continued and brought to its end once they had been dealt with. Then, the member of the Executive Council Maynz was given the floor to provide its financial report. According to this, the Executive Council had accrued means to the

value of around 650,000 marks, of which 450,000 franks in Swiss banknotes, which at the time were exchanged for 620,000 marks. The total expenses for daily allowances, material costs, agitation, and propaganda amounted to around 614,000 marks. Maynz confirmed Richard Müller's indication that he had claimed and withdrawn nothing for himself personally, and further remarked that the Executive Council had taken energetic measures against the extensive apparatus that had been caused mostly by its soldierly members, and by 14 December had somewhat cleaned up its affairs.

For the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* its member W. Dittmann of Independent Social Democracy spoke next. He showed that some of Müller's claims were partly incorrect and partly unjustified. Minister Solf had had his application for discharge approved. Not Ed. David but Karl Kautsky and Max Quarck were tasked with the inspection of documents in the Foreign Office, and Kautsky had discovered no sign that permitted the conclusion that any documents had been destroyed, but rather had told them that he had found far more than he had expected. Captain Lorenz had been released after an investigative commission of three jurists appointed by the Executive Council itself had decided in favour of his release. Moving onto the substance of his polemic, Dittmann explained that the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* had mostly acted under the compulsion of inexorable necessities, the consequences of the war, and the situation this had created. Germany needed a preliminary peace as soon as possible, and then a rapid permanent peace. That was the first precondition of reconstructing economic life, which had been broken by the war after having been entirely geared towards it. Converting the economy to peacetime was an extremely difficult and unproductive task, the most necessary raw materials were missing, hunger was burrowing away at the people's guts, never had there been a more desperate situation for a people and its government. As a result, socialisation could only be set in motion with caution, but it would be undertaken where industry and businesses were ready for it. A commission of renowned economists had been set up with the task of investigating the question and making appropriate recommendations. Then the speaker developed the tax programme of the government, referred to its social-policy ordinances, the establishment of the eight-hour workday, unemployment benefits, etc., and added that socialism would only be able to fully develop after a transitional period. The wealth that the workers had created for the greatest part no longer existed, the workers hitherto had been and now still were disinherited, they first

had to create new things of value again before they could come to prosperity. No government could change anything about this. The workers had to do everything to keep production up and running. Every strike was a hindrance to this. Demobilisation was causing great difficulties, but until it had been completed the *Oberste Heeresleitung* had to stay in office and discipline had to be maintained, though this should not be mistaken for blind obedience. That was how the telegram that Müller had mentioned from the government to the *Oberste Heeresleitung* addressing this was to be understood. Certainly, a reactionary spirit still prevailed among many officers, and quite a few had counterrevolutionary convictions. But the overwhelming majority of the soldiers did not want a counterrevolution. Hence, the government was watchful regarding *putsch* attempts, but not excessively anxious. The state of siege had been lifted, full press freedom had been proclaimed, however much its enemies on right and left might attack the government, it would nonetheless still set itself against any prohibitions on press freedom. The government had introduced the freest franchise in the world in order to secure permanently for the proletariat its influence over the fate of the Republic. Unanimously it had already placed in prospect the calling of a constitutive national assembly on 12 November, even if now the call of the reactionaries for it was making many workers nervous about it, it still had to come about for a whole range of reasons. Weighty reasons spoke against convening the *Nationalversammlung* too early, just as weighty ones spoke against too long a deferral. The government had weighed all of them up seriously and ultimately agreed on 16 February 1919 as the date for the election, about which the Congress now had ultimately to decide. Now it was for the proletariat to stand together in common struggle against the bourgeois parties, shoulder to shoulder, and waste not an atom of their strength on fratricidal war.

This speech, which was delivered throughout in a conciliatory tone, received rapturous applause especially among the Majority socialists, whereas a part of the speaker's own party comrades refrained from any such demonstration.

In the discussion about these reports, most of the speakers spoke against the Berlin Executive Council. It only found lively defenders among the delegates Braß (Remscheid), Wegmann (Berlin), Hecker (Chemnitz), and Georg Ledebour (Berlin), the last of whom even eclipsed Müller's criticism in his attacks on the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. He provoked an indescribable racket by calling the government member Ebert a stain

[*Schandmal*] on the government because of the answer he had given to the demonstrating soldiers on 6 December. Against Dittmann's comment that one could not make revolutions happen, he observed that he and some of his friends had already made preparations for the Revolution as early as 1916, and that on 2 November 1918 in a session of its revolutionary committee all the participants except Haase and one other had been of the view that they should launch it on 4 November. On the evening of the same day, in a further session, Dittmann had then also joined Haase's side, while Karl Liebknecht was recommending his *putsch* tactic, which in turn he, Ledebour, had opposed. So the matter had been delayed by several days as a result of the obstruction from the defeatists, and Ebert-Scheidemann given the opportunity to take matters into their own hands. Until the outbreak of the Revolution, Scheidemann and his friends had been the beneficiaries of the state of siege, and now they were the beneficiaries of the Revolution.

From the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* also Otto Landsberg, Emil Barth, and Fritz Ebert took the floor in this discussion. The first of them defended the *Rat* against a series of Müller's accusations, and justified its objection to the Berlin Executive Council's demands for money, but Barth surprised his colleagues in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* with a philippic directed at them. He reproached them for proceeding far too cautiously in questions of Germany's demilitarisation, for giving the militarists far too free a rein in questions of the allegedly necessary border defence in the East and West, and for allowing themselves to be treated far too arbitrarily. He put forward a motion, on behalf of which he intervened energetically, that any border protection that was not necessary for demobilisation must immediately be removed in East and West. All officers must immediately be dismissed as soon as they had arrived at their garrisons, the older and sick ones in exchange for a pension, the young ones in return for guaranteed means to learn a civic profession. Ebert countered that if Barth thought that he was going to make his colleagues in cabinet the objects of attack, it should have been his duty to talk to them about this beforehand. What he had presented were in part things about which resolutions had been passed unanimously in cabinet, about others decisions were still outstanding. The government had had to ensure that troops were returned home as quickly as possible, and that large-scale food transport was secured, which had made certain military protective measures unavoidable. In the question of security measures in the West, which were demanded by comrades and soldiers from many sides, only proposals so far lay before the

Heer leadership, regarding which the government had enquired with them about more precise information, the answer to which they were waiting for. No resolution had yet been made at all. Could one thereby deem Barth's actions to be justified? It was endangering their collaboration to the highest degree, and he, Ebert, would have to reserve to his closer friends the decision of whether they were even still in the position of continuing to collaborate at all, if pledges were not given against any further such conduct.

Ebert had spoken with a restrained bitterness, but his final remark provoked all the greater uproar, and speakers raised their hands on all sides, which prompted Chairman Leinert to call on the delegates to divide themselves into factions so that a systematic ordering of the list of speakers could take place. At the time, besides the two social-democratic factions, there were also the soldiers' faction and the faction of Democrats.

Here the interruption by the soldiers' deputation described above took place, which led to the adjournment of the session until the following day. Then, on 18 December, the soldiers' motions were first discussed, the renewed detachment of *Spartakus* people dealt with, and the closing speeches heard from Müller and Dittmann. Müller defended the Berlin Executive Council against the attacks that had been levelled at it in the discussion, and reasserted his attacks on the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, Dittmann repudiated these attacks, emphasising against Ledebour that his accusations against Ebert had already been rejected in a joint session of the Executive Council and the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, in which out of 35 members of the Executive Council only 5 had voted in favour of Ledebour's motion to deprive Ebert of his office, and insisting with regard to Barth's complaints that the government was keeping an extremely close watch on the military, and then advocated once again emphatically the firm cohesion of socialists beyond all partisan differences.

In the vote, a motion by the left-radical socialist Braß (Remscheid), to immediately undertake all measures to disarm the counterrevolution, was accepted, but the other motions tabled by the radical side, among them Barth's motion, were rejected. It is worth mentioning that one of these motions was brought under the name of Leviné (Essen), that is it had the Bolshevist Leviné as its author, who later played a part in the communist uprising in Munich. The motion stated that the activities of the *Volksbeauftragte* amounted to the systematic annihilation of the power of the councils, and thereby served to strengthen the counterrevolution.

Against the motions of the radicals, the following motion by the Majority socialists Lüdemann and his comrades was accepted by a great majority:

> The Reich conference of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany, which represents overall political power in Germany, transfers legislative and executive power [*die gesetzgebende und die vollziehende Gewalt*] to the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* until otherwise regulated by the *Nationalversammlung*. The Congress further appoints a Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils which exercises monitory supervision [*Überwachung*] over the German and the Prussian cabinet. It has the right to appoint and recall the *Volksbeauftragte* of the Reich, and, until the permanent regulation of state affairs, also the *Volksbeauftragte* of Prussia. To supervise the conduct of business in the Reich Offices, Assistants [*Beigeordnete*] are appointed to their Secretaries of State by the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. Two Assistants are dispatched into every Reich Office, which are to be selected from the two social-democratic parties. The Central Council is to be consulted before appointing expert ministers [*Fachminister*] and Assistants.

Although this resolution thereby granted the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils a very far-reaching right of control over the *Volksbeauftragte*, the radical Independents and communists still saw in it so great a truncation of the councils' authority to wield power that they made repeated attempts to regain what had been lost in their view through proposals for more precise interpretation of its meanings and new motions. They were offered the instrument to do so by the second point on the order of business: discussion of the question national assembly or council system.

This was introduced by the speeches of the Majority socialist Max *Cohen-Reuß* and a counter-speech by Ernst *Däumig*. The former was extraordinarily carefully worked-through and made a deep impression. It began with a comprehensive description of all the difficulties with which the German Republic would have to contend at home and abroad, which it would not be able to master if it did not put an end to the disorganisation that had set in as speedily as possible. But that would only be possible through the *Nationalversammlung*. At the moment, "politics had become the precondition for the economy", a well-regulated production in Germany had only become possible through the *Nationalversammlung* that would give the country a constitution and hold the Reich together. The workers' and soldiers' councils only ever expressed the partial will of the people, never the will of the whole people. Anybody who appealed to

Karl Marx for their theories of dictatorship misrecognised the spirit of his doctrine. Socialism could not be decreed by force, it was a process of organic development and alteration. In Russia, they had done things entirely backwards. The fear that the *Nationalversammlung* would not attain a socialist majority if socialisation had not taken place beforehand was thoroughly unjustified; the sooner the elections for the *Nationalversammlung* took place, the more favourable would be their result for socialism. Social Democracy also needed the support of noteworthy bourgeois and intellectual circles, whose influence one should not underestimate. A strike by these elements would bring a collapse and the invasion of the Entente troops, it was not at all possible to count on a revolution in the Entente countries for the time being. The workers' and soldiers' councils were better than their reputation, they might have spent more money than necessary, but for that they saved things that were worth billions. The tasks of the *Nationalversammlung*, however, they could not fulfil, but instead continue to exist alongside it and perform good work. Amid tempestuous cheers and clapping, the speaker asked the assembly to approve his motion, which demanded the scheduling of elections for the *Nationalversammlung* already on 19 January 1919. With the exhortation to campaign inexhaustibly for socialism until election day, he closed his speech, which was followed by renewed and long-lasting applause.

Faced with the mood this speech had created, the speaker against the motion, Däumig, did not have an easy position. In his introduction, he expressed his regret about the philistine course of the assembly, and declared that through its jubilant approval of the demand for a national assembly, it had pronounced a death-sentence over the council system, but that this would live on nonetheless, as it was the default organisational form of the modern revolution. While it still met with many prejudices among even the class comrades of the revolutionary working class, the future belonged to it. Just as the parliamentary system had been the historical necessity of bourgeois democracy, so the council system was the real form in which to express socialist society. "When you applauded Cohen so animatedly, when he demanded the *Nationalversammlung* and the sooner election date, you pronounced your own death-sentence", the speaker called out to the assembly, and launched into illustrations of the evil effects that convening the *Nationalversammlung* would have as a consequence. His counter-motion demanded that the council system be preserved in all circumstances as the fundamental basis of the socialist republic, "and in such a way that the councils are due the highest legislative and

executive force", the elaboration of a generally applicable electoral system for the workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils of Germany, the announcement of elections on the basis of this system for a National Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany, which should have to render a decision about the future constitution of Germany. Until then, a Central Council of 53 delegates of workers' and soldiers' councils, to be chosen from all parts of Germany, should form the highest controlling authority of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* and the Reich Offices.

After speakers had spoken for and against the convocation of the *Nationalversammlung* in the debate, Lipinski of Independent Social Democracy demanded a precise clarification about the order of business, namely what was to be understood in Lüdemann's resolved motion, which actually belonged under this point of business, under parliamentary oversight of the *Volksbeauftragte* by the Central Council. In the name of the *Volksbeauftrage*, Hugo Haase (Independent) gives the following explanation:

> Under parliamentary oversight, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* understands that all draft laws are laid before the Central Council, and all important bills are discussed with it. It considers it completely out of the question that under this regulation rifts could emerge between it and the Central Council. In this revolutionary period, fast legislative work must be done. Should it not come to an agreement in any case, then no vacuum may emerge, but the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* must then be able to make a decision itself, so long as it has the confidence of the Executive Council, which can dismiss it at any time.

Geyer (Independent) demanded a break in the session, since this information was insufficient for him and his friends; they had to have an opportunity to discuss the changed situation within their faction. But this motion was rejected, whereupon Braß (Remscheid) called on his like-minded comrades to leave the chamber and come to a conclusion about whether they could still continue to take part in the negotiations. While the *Spartakus* people and the greater part of the Independents left the chamber, Hugo Haase once again addressed the matter himself.

The chairman of the Independents' faction explained that there was unanimity within the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* about the fact that the *Nationalversammlung* had to be convened, but that there were still differences of opinion about its purpose. The framing of the question national

assembly or council system was wrong, since the councils would still retain their significance even after the *Nationalversammlung* had been convened. The reasons that had been deployed in favour of the immediate calling of the *Nationalversammlung* had already been disproven as erroneous by the facts, and thoroughly compelling reasons rather spoke against scheduling the election date very early. Voting could not take place in the occupied territories, a great share of the soldiers could not yet vote, another great share did not even know yet what this election was about. "The fate of the young Republic may not rest in the hands of unenlightened voters." A great work of clarification still needed to be carried out—above all among women, who were now voting for the first time. Over the course of his speech, which was received with cheers on all sides, Haase sharply protested against the prospect of Poles voting in territories that still belonged to Germany before a decision had been reached about territorial borders.

Of the delegates speaking after Haase, representatives of soldiers' councils especially favoured holding the elections as soon as possible. Similarly *Volksbeauftragter* Scheidemann. He declared himself against the permanent existence of the workers' and soldiers' councils, since it would mean "the absolutely certain demise of trade and industry, the ruin of the Reich, and incalculable misery for our people". If the whole people should share responsibility, then it should also be able to share in decisions. In such a desperate situation, one class could not bear this responsibility alone. After all, even in Berlin those who wanted to postpone the elections were in the minority, they just made more of a spectacle than the others. "We thank them for their daily drives with machine guns, we do not want a civil war, we want to secure work, peace, and bread for our people, with thereby also the achievements of the Revolution."

These last words, which riffed on the processions that confronted the residents of the capital on a daily basis thanks to the *Spartakus* people under Karl Liebknecht's leadership, were again received by the majority with tumultuous approval. Then, after the speakers had replied to their critics in their final statements, the motion by Geyer and his comrades to schedule the elections for 16 March 1919 was rejected by all but 50 votes, the passage in the draft election law by the *Volksbeauftragte*, which planned election day for 16 February 1919, was rejected by all but a slightly greater minority, whereas Cohen's motion already to hold the elections on 19 January 1919 was accepted by about 400 to about 50. At the request of the Independents, a special vote took place on Däumig's proposal. This resulted in 98 votes in favour, and 344 against, and so the motion was rejected.

A motion by Geyer, who wanted to formulate the passage in the Lüdemann resolution that Haase had interpreted as follows: "The Central Council has the full right of assenting to or rejecting laws before their promulgation", is described by Ebert as unacceptable to the *Volksbeauftragte* in the following words:

> We stand before difficulties that no highly-developed country has seen before it. If they are to be overcome, the government must retain a certain degree of room for manoeuvre. A unified will must go through the whole country, above all the central authority must be able to work quickly. The right allotted to the Central Council to recall the members of the government rules out any arbitrariness on the part of the government, and gives it absolute certainty that all bearers of governmental power must hold the confidence of their commissaries. That should be enough for you. … We are lacking in raw materials and food. Only the fastest action can save us when important questions appear. If we had to get the Central Council's approval for every law, that would be all the more impossible than it is today, when everything that was otherwise decided by a directive from the *Bundesrat* or the Reich Offices must be done through a law. We must take the most difficult decisions immediately, e.g., with telephone requests from the armistice commission. Our friends from the Independents will tell me straightaway that if the Congress approves Geyer's motion, we cannot possibly continue to bear that responsibility. What can happen, should happen as far as collaboration with the Central Council goes, but executive and legislative must lie in the hands of the *Volksbeauftragte*.

That was what the Congress had resolved the previous day, and the *Volksbeauftragte* were not willing to carry the responsibility that would rest on them if it now overturned this. That was not a threat, but merely an expression of their conviction, implanted in them by experience, and also that of the representatives of Independent Social Democracy.

Despite this statement, delivered with great seriousness, the radical Independents, the lawyer Obuch and *Volksbeauftragter* Barth again spoke vehemently in favour of Geyer's motion. Obuch's speech closed with the words: "Something else lies behind the arguments about the aggravated complications in legislation and administration. Proletarians, be on your guard! Hold fast to your rights!" Barth argued that Geyer's motion had to be accepted in order to regain the trust of the masses. Opposing this, *Lüdemann* moved in the name of the social-democratic faction to let matters rest with Haase's explanation, whereupon *Volksbeauftragter Landsberg*

explained once more that, if the *Rat der Volksbeaufragten* was to be capable of carrying out its work, Geyer's motion was unacceptable.

At the request from the Independent side, which causes great noisy scenes, a specific vote is resolved about the motions of Geyer and Lüdemann. Its result, which is announced the next day, is 290 votes for Lüdemann's motion, 115 votes for Geyer's. Matters are then left at Haase's interpretation about the relationship of the Executive Council and the *Volksbeauftragte*.

Meanwhile, in the faction of the Independents, at Ledebour's instigation and against the urgent advice of Haase, a resolution is adopted not to participate at all in the election of members of the agreed-on Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and the Independent Braß informs the Congress of this. As a result, only the persons indicated on the list of the Social-Democratic Party are elected to the Central Council, which is set at 27 members, namely:

> Robert Leinert (Hanover), Georg Mayer (Eastern Front), Hermann Wäger (Eastern Front), Hugo Struve (Western Front), Emil Pörschmann (Western Front), Max Cohen (Home Guard), Max Pfaff (*Marine*), Müller (Berlin), Heinrich Zwesta (Nuremberg), Heinrich Schäfer (Köln), Hermann Kahmann (Dresden), Fritz Herbert (Stettin), Walter Lampel (Hamburg), Albert Stuber (Eßlingen), Richard Kater (Karlsruhe), Wilhelm Knoblauch (Darmstadt), Gustav Heller (Berlin), Karl Prokesch (Münden), Karl Zörgiebel (Köln), Karl Bethge (Freiburg), Fritz Voigt (Breslau), Heinrich Kürbig (Hamburg), Otto Sydow (Brandenburg), Albert Grzesinski (Kassel), Max König (Dortmund), Fritz Faß (Western Front), Robert Kohl (Eastern Front).

With the abstention of the Independents, the position of their party members in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* was compromised in the gravest way possible. It brought Haase and his comrades very close to the brink of themselves stepping down as well. If they did not do so, then with that they made a sacrifice for the cause of the Republic, which the newly-elected Central Council also acknowledged by the fact that it did not even call their mandate into question at all.

From the Independent side—Geyer (Leipzig)—came a request, since the Congress had set itself against all separatist endeavours and now scheduled the elections for the *Nationalversammlung* for 19 January, that it be resolved that Landtag elections should not take place any more at all.

Against this, it is pointed out that in some states such elections had already taken place, and its acceptance would only have the effect of fragmenting the election campaign, and to gift the bourgeois parties a slogan that would resonate powerfully among wide circles of the people. It is then also rejected, with only a small minority in favour.

Rudolf Hilferding's speech about the socialisation of economic life, which was the next item on the order of business, can be characterised as an expert description of the path that socialisation would rationally have to take, namely to begin with the production of coal and the mass products of heavy industry, given its already monopolistic character, and then proceed gradually from there. Thereby one would also gain a strong influence over bank capital, while the immediate socialisation of the banks, given the shattered state of German economic life, which first had to be reconstructed, was not recommended. Only individual branches of banking were suited to this. But if one only socialised individual groups of enterprises, compensation for the owners was not to be avoided, which could take place through awarding state annuities. In the countryside, only large-scale propertied estates were suitable for socialisation, but one could get at the rest of agriculture through a grain monopoly. In any case, socialisation would take time, a political revolution could take place relatively easily, but the replacement of one economic form with another was, by contrast, a protracted process—the Revolution could work no miracles there. After all, the German proletariat was also in the position of being able to wait, since it had the eight-hour day and was in a period of rising wages. In the meantime, the workers should not regard the question of socialisation as a question of wages, but as the realisation of a social ideal, which demanded the systematic cooperation of all socialists. Socialists had to fill humanity with the spirit of this ideal.

His address earned lively applause, in which especially the faction of the Majority socialists took part. Among their ranks was also spoken predominantly in his vein in the following discussion. The delegates Möhlich (Dortmund), Berten (Düsseldorf), Schreck (Bielefeld), and others energetically stressed that with socialisation it was a matter of work that demanded organic proceeding, which was thus to be prepared for in the first instance through controls on factory operations [*Betriebskontrolle*] and similar measures. In contrast to this, Emil Barth and others demanded immediate socialisation, which was already necessary for the reason that it would otherwise be impossible to keep the workers in the plants.

After a short closing statement by Hilferding, in which he once more warned against assuming that socialisation would immediately bring about an improvement in workers' material situation, and added that it would under some circumstance even demand sacrifices of the workers, since one would have to take over enterprises that had been badly mismanaged, which would not immediately be able to pay high wages, a motion by Lüdemann-Severing is accepted with a large majority that instructs the government to begin immediately with the socialisation of all industries that were ready for it, in particular in mining. In the same way, a motion tabled by the Independents is accepted that demands a minimum wage and an eight-hour day for mineworkers that takes into account travel to and from work. Likewise a motion from the soldiers' faction for an imminent promulgation of a Homestead Law and the fostering of the homestead movement through an emergency ordinance.

By contrast, quite a different fate befell a motion by the soldiers' faction, which demanded a unification of the two social-democratic factions, and in particular the formation of a joint social-democratic front in the election campaign. This led to turbulent scenes that eclipsed everything that had already taken place at the Congress in this respect.

First, the Independent Seeger (Leipzig) recommends not even bringing this motion to a vote at all, since the Congress was not responsible for it, and the Majorityist Severing (Bielefeld) declared himself content with this. The Majorityist Sicker (Frankfurt) disagrees with this, and the member of the soldiers' faction Heitmann (Königsberg) then offered arguments in favour of their motion. What follows is taken from the *Vorwärts* report on 21 December 1918 about the motion's acceptance.

Heitmann (soldiers' faction) speaks in favour of the motion in a lively speech:

> The soldiers have no understanding for this fraternal struggle, even so far as they condemn Scheidemann's war policy. Now, after the end of the war, there is no more reason whatsoever for a split because of war policy. *Millions of soldiers* think so. The differences are not so great anymore at all. Need and misery have to be removed as quickly as possible. In the struggle against capitalism, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of fraternal struggle anymore. In this historic moment, the two parties should reunite. *(Lively applause. — Noisy protests against the Majority socialists among the left radicals and those who had gotten up onto the rostrum.)* That is the result if we do not go united into the election campaign. *(Ostentatious applause among the Majority.)*

After the soldier had spoken, remarking among other things that the contrast between Haase and Liebknecht was greater than that between Haase and Ebert, the Majorityist Kahmann (Dresden) agreed with him, but Georg Ledebour did not. He described what the motion wanted as all well and good, but not to be achieved in the way proposed.

> In collaboration with the workers, we must win them over to the most determined social-revolutionary struggle which we are waging, but not through merging or joint lists, as Dittmann has recommended as well. *(Dittmann: "No, I did not say that, I only stressed the necessity of a common struggle of the proletariat." — Opposing shout from the radical corner: With Scheidemann?)* To enter into a cabinet with Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg, who are primarily to blame for the fact that capitalism was able to survive the war, was the worst mistake our friends in the USPD made. *(Tumultuous approval among the radicals. Lively dissent by the Majority.)* The surprise assault by Lüdemann and the violation by these unenlightened people *(the speaker gestures to the soldiers, new raucous enunciations of approval and dissent)*, who still suffer from the psychosis of sedition, prove that the time for unity will only have come once even these unenlightened people have recognised the meaning of the Revolution. *(Tumultuous dissent from the Majority, great applause among the radicals, calls from there and from the rostrum: We must throw out these traitors to the people* [*Volksverräter*]*.)*

The next speaker is *Volksbeauftragter* Scheidemann. Hardly has he appeared on the platform than a fearful noise breaks out. Radical delegates break out in endless insults against him, like "rascal", "scoundrel", "warmonger", etc., and are supported in this by those occupying the platform, some of whom interject with shouts, others strike up a noisy concert by jangling their housekeys, some even on street urchins' pipes that they had brought along, which the Majority socialists answered with indignant opposing shouts and rousing greetings for Scheidemann as well as sustained clapping. Only with great effort can the speaker make himself intelligible, for hardly had he said a few words than the noise begins all over again. He acknowledges the good intentions of the motion by the soldiers' faction, but notes the impossibility of entering into a purely party-political discussion at this Congress; here objective judgment was impossible. All efforts in this direction had only achieved the opposite of what they wanted.

Calls from the radicals in the chamber and on the rostrums: First Scheidemann has to go, away with Scheidemann!

> *Scheidemann*: In any case, I am going to go eat in half an hour. *(Great hilarity and more noise.)* The outcome of this unity motion was this argument and Ledebour's last speech. What has come out of it is at most a new intensification of our mutual aversion. It has become clear again that some comrades, instead of fighting capitalism, would rather break up the working class — — —

The noise now rises through altercations in the chamber between Majorityists and Independents to an indescribable intensity, so that Scheidemann, after waiting for some time, declares that despite his good lungs he would forego doing battle with those who were shouting. He steps down from the platform with the words:

> The answer that you do not wish to hear from me, the German workers will give you on 19 January.

Renewed turbulence, whereupon the soldiers' delegate Lampel withdraws the resolution in the name of his faction with the comment that he asked his friends on the Western and Southwestern Fronts to make known there what they had seen in Berlin, so that their comrades could give an answer to it, and a female delegate, Frau Lau, calls on the delegates in emotional words to use the time until the day of the election for unremitting agitation for socialism, and ends with a renewed exhortation for unity. Yet a suggestion by the revolutionary faction of Lautenberg and his comrades to enter into discussion about the unification motion again is rejected by the Congress. A motion by the Independent faction to immediately resume diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia is passed over to the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* with a sizeable majority. Two further protests of the opposite tendency that had been conveyed to the Congress are read out, and then the Congress is closed with a short speech by Chairman Leinert, which closes with these words:

> We do not want the dissolution of the German people and Germany, but to lead them upwards to the highest point of civilisation, to good fortune and freedom, so that it also gains a love for work, work not for the capitalist, but for itself. Long live revolutionary socialist Germany, the united socialist Republic of Germany!

And with the exception of some of the radicals, the delegates raise three cheers together.

Still on the same day, the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils voted for by the Congress constitutes itself, and chooses as its chairmen Leinert (Hanover), Cohen-Reuß, and Hermann Müller (Berlin), as its secretary Wäger (Eastern Front), and as its treasurer Schäfer (Köln). A discussion with the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* about the implementation of the motions accepted by the Congress results in agreement on all substantial points. The composition of the *Rat* is left unchanged.

But that only affected the personnel. The positions of the two groups of which it was composed towards one another had shifted significantly. While the entire Central Council now backed the three members of Majority Social Democracy, the abstention of the Independents in the election of the Central Council, achieved by Ledebour and his sympathisers, had deprived the three members from Independent Social Democracy of any partisan backing in it, so that they had to expect now to be outvoted at the first serious difference of opinions.

For the time being, goodwill certainly prevailed in both groups, so long as it was in any way a question of maintaining the collaboration in the *Rat*. The members of Majority Social Democracy in the *Rat* grasped of what value it was for the Republic's cause that its leadership did not present itself to the masses as the representatives of a single faction, and the loyal behaviour of Haase and Dittmann at the Congress left room to hope that the collegial association would still perhaps at least last until the meeting of the *Nationalversammlung*. But those two Independents and also Emil Barth felt it was their duty to stay in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* for so long as it remained possible for them to assert their view there with success. The organ of the Independents, *Freiheit*, wrote in its article about the Congress regarding the stance of the Independents:

> By refusing to take part in the vote, they gave up an important means … of influencing future policy, and beyond this put the *Volksbeauftragte* belonging to the Independent Party into an awkward position. In future, they will find it so much more difficult than hitherto to make their influence count and drive the policy of the government forward in a socialist vein. But to entirely abandon any influence within the government, to also cease collaboration in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, just as the left wing of the Congress abandoned their participation in the Central Executive Council, cannot be our goal. Development hitherto has shown that our comrades in

> the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* may well have to contend with obstructions and have not been able to carry out all their wishes, but that their influence still did not remain ineffective. An exit could only contribute to weakening the revolutionary energy of the government even further, and open all the doors to bourgeois influence.

But *Vorwärts* had already written about the Independents on the previous evening: "They say they are needed to drive Social Democracy forwards. We doubt that, but are very willing to put up with such a forward drive if it comes about *from within*, and only in this way can it be effective so far as should even be necessary at all."

And in its issue of 21 December, it wrote regarding the last day of the Congress:

> This day too has shown how little still divides social democrats of the various groups from one another. Hilferding's clever speech about *socialisation* could also just as well have been held by a "right-wing socialist". Where divergent opinions came to light in the debate, it was still clear that they stood on a shared factual basis.

That all sounded very hopeful, but in reality the collaboration in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* would not last more than another ten days.

Note

1. Richard Müller (1880–1943), German metalworker and socialist political activist and thinker, one of the principal advocates of council democracy and opponents of parliamentarism during the Revolution, founding leader of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards in January 1918, chairman of the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils after November 1918, and a major intellectual influence on Karl Korsch.

Check for updates

CHAPTER 12

The Sailors' Uprising in Berlin, Christmas 1918

It lay in the nature of things that the outcome of the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils was received with great displeasure among the ranks of those socialists in Berlin who were suspicious or decidedly oppositionally-disposed towards the Ebert-Haase government. It had to be especially disagreeable to the more radical elements of the Berlin Executive Council. Because this had now been disrobed of its mandate as the leading organ of the workers and soldiers of Germany who were on the side of the Revolution, but in the government, the position of the moderate socialists had been quite substantially strengthened. All the same, it must be acknowledged that the Executive Council loyally submitted to the resolution of the Congress that changed its position. In an announcement signed by Max Cohen and Hermann Müller on behalf of the newly-elected Central Council, and Brutus Molkenbuhr and Richard Müller in the name of the Executive Council, the change of functions on 21 December was made public, with the addition that all the authorisations and legitimations issued by the Executive Council would become ineffective on 28 December, and from then on mandates for the affairs of the Reich and Prussia would be issued by the Central Council, and those for Berlin matters by the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Greater Berlin. But the turmoil in people's spirits continues, and is cultivated in every way by the *Spartakus* League and its agents. When on 21 December the workers who had fallen in the clash on 6 December are borne in a solemn procession to be buried, Karl Liebknecht

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spoke three times and accused each time in the harshest terms the men of the government for bearing sole blame for the shooting and the deaths of the fallen. In its issue of 22 December, *Vorwärts* refutes this and writes:

> We want the free democratic ordering of the Republic. Liebknecht is baiting people into a civil war with his lies, and then wails about the victims, which after all are only victims of *his own unconscionable activity*. He cannot be made to see reason. But we hope for the reason, the prudence, the sense of justice of the *Berlin workers*!

These characteristics were surely also present to a high degree. But factors of the most varied kind conspired to unsettle their confidence in the goodwill and circumspection of the people in government who the *Spartakus* League were attacking with especial zeal. Moreover, not everything happened that was necessary to enlighten the workers about the meaning of the slogans that were being thrown into the masses.

Mid-December 1918, the *Spartakus* League had published a manifesto in which it programmatically outlined its politics and its goals. In language that echoed the terse sentences of the *Communist Manifesto*, it mixed together allusions to it with purely Blanquist slogans and extracts from the pronouncements and ordinances of the Bolshevists. It says there, for instance, after the societal state they aspired to has been briefly sketched out as "communism":

> For the transition to this societal state, the armed rule of the working class is necessary.
>
> Under the rule of the working class, all decisive and implementary power lies with the workers' and soldiers' councils and their executive committees. The highest power lies with the Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and its Executive Committee.
>
> Only the poor working population may have the right to vote for these workers' and soldiers' councils. Anybody who does not work also shall not rule.
>
> Under the rule of the working class, the property of the capitalists in the means of production and exchange is removed. All banks, the beating hearts of the capitalist economic system, and the industrial and commercial enterprises are taken into the possession of the workers.
>
> Under the rule of the working class, the working population will first be adequately provided for in the distribution of food.

> To realise absolute press freedom for the workers, paper materials and fuel are confiscated and placed at the disposal of the workers.
>
> As the military support of its rule, the working population shall create a communist guard consisting of workers and soldiers.

And in a section entitled "The need of the hour", it elaborates:

> The rule of the working class can only be reached by means of armed workers' revolution. The communists are its standard bearers.
>
> It will come about because the bourgeoisie is putting up a defensive fight, and the working class will only have to choose between servitude under the bourgeoisie and its rule over the bourgeoisie.
>
> The *Nationalversammlung* being prepared by the current government would be an organ for counterrevolutionaries to suffocate the workers' revolution. Its creation must be prevented at all costs.

With that, if words still have any meaning anymore, the violent struggle was proclaimed to suppress all non-Spartacist elements, and the violation of the executive organs of the Republic. To top it all, this is followed shortly after by a passage taken from the literary arsenal of Blanquism: "The bourgeoisie is preparing for civil war. It wants it to happen." To this claim, which at that moment was devoid of any factual basis, was added this appeal:

> We thus call on the workers: Be ready! Organise yourselves, the battle to clear the way to communism is close at hand. Carry the revolutionary spirit into the masses of the workers!

Yet then it suddenly goes on to say:

> The proletarian revolution does not need any *terror* for its goals. It hates and *abhors murder*. It does not need these means of struggle because it is not fighting individuals, but rather institutions.

But even the immediately following section "Measures to secure the Revolution" contains provisions that, like the prevention of the elections for the *Nationalversammlung*, which had only just been agreed by the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, could not even be implemented at all as things stood without terror and bloody battle. Already the first sentence proclaims:

> Disarmament of the entire police, all officers, as well as non-proletarian soldiers, disarmament of all members of the ruling classes.

It is hard to believe that as intellectually talented and scientifically educated a person as Rosa Luxemburg could have contributed to such a shoddy piece of workmanship, which is as confused as it is demagogically rabble-rousing. Especially the programme of economic measures betrays a high degree of ignorance about the most elementary requirements of the economic life of an industrialised state such as Germany. Still, one must grant her one thing: as a woman and on top of that a foreigner, she had only ever come to know the workings of legislation and administration in Germany from the outside, but had no clear conception of their internal operations, just as the organic drivers of economic enterprises and their functional essential conditions must also have been entirely unfamiliar to her. Despite all that, the fact that attempting to put this manifesto into practice had to plunge Germany into a situation of murderous and destructive anarchy could not have escaped her, and even less Karl Liebknecht, who had been active in legislation and administration. But one could not assume this insight among the many politically uneducated elements that suddenly found themselves drawn into this political movement at the time, and since it became ever clearer that great parts of these elements had been corrupted by the dialectic of this manifesto, it was not superfluous to explain its internal contradictions and the pernicious nature of its injunctions effectively to the people in fliers using clear, comprehensible language. But this did not happen. For sure, people challenged the tendencies that it expressed in general remarks, but found it unnecessary to preoccupy themselves with it more closely, evidently because they believed that they could be confident that the great majority of workers and soldiers would not let themselves be carried away by it into doing anything foolish. But nothing has a habit of avenging itself more gravely in times of general fomenting than underestimating a minority that appeals to people's passions. In such times, one must always expect that moments will come where the prudent elements, as lies in their nature, become unreliable through passivity, and the elements who are borne by their passions to greater activity rule the streets and attain an impact that far exceeds their numerical strength.

The sailors' uprising in the Christmas days of 1918, which broke out barely three days after the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' councils had broken up, and which led to a bloody street battle between government

troops and sailors supported by *Spartakus* people, acted as a test of this. In the face of the so very fateful effects of this clash on the further development of the Republic, a detailed account of its causes and its course seems appropriate.

The relationship between the government and the so-called *Volksmarinedivision* stationed in Berlin had become more and more unsatisfying by the day. In part, the causes were not of a political nature. Over a thousand sailors had been housed in the rooms of the large former *Marstall* opposite the old *Königsschloss*, and part of them was carrying out guard duty in the latter, which held all manner of cultural artefacts in its state rooms. Of these valuable things, whose administration was subject to the Finance Ministry, quite a number soon went missing, whether because there were persons among the sailors themselves who could not resist the temptation to acquire some public property, or because of the many visitors who came and went from the rooms that had now been allocated to the sailors, several used the opportunity for wild requisitions. Masses of stolen property were spirited away in barges that were moored at the waterfront of the *Schloss*. As these thefts piled up, the Finance Ministry made ever more pressure for change. The sailors' representatives also showed goodwill to take remedial action, but the protective measures that were now passed still proved inadequate, and misappropriations still took place again and again in spite of them. On 12 December, Finance Minister Hugo Simon, a member of Independent Social Democracy, submitted a memorandum to the State Ministry that demanded an immediate intervention, and speedy and complete removal of the sailors' division from the *Schloss* and the *Marstall*. This relocation, it says, must "take place unexpectedly and suddenly, so that there is no further opportunity to carry off stolen objects that are definitely still in their quarters."[1] Thus the government passed a resolution to immediately remove the *Marinedivision* from the *Schloss*. Since this fell within the remit of the city headquarters as regards billeting and local movements, it was the task of this body, which was headed by the Majority socialist Otto Wels, to negotiate with the sailors regarding the *minutiae* of their departure from the *Schloss*.

But very different views and wishes prevailed among these. The *Volksmarinedivision* had in fact put in a request with the government to increase its strength, to remove them from the formation of the *Marine*, and to attach them as a permanent troop to the somewhat better-paid Republican *Soldatenwehr* [Soldiers' Defence Force] that was being formed under Wels' leadership in Berlin. When the sailors heard that, on the

contrary, the strength of their division was to be reduced to 600 men, and that they should completely leave the *Schloss*, this provoked not insignificant bad feeling among part of them, which was thoroughly stoked by radical elements. *Volksbeauftragter* Ebert, who looked after military affairs in the government, had tasked Wels with contacting the *Volksmarinedivision* about implementing the resolution mentioned above, and he obtained its promise to proceed in accordance with the resolution, and over the two following days 90 men altogether were also discharged. But then other influences asserted themselves. No further discharges were reported, and the sailors remained in the *Schloss*. As it later transpired, the opinion had spread among them that the definitive decision about their staying there did not lie with the *Volksbeauftragte*, but with the Berlin Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, whose composition had developed towards the more radical side. That is what explains the appearance of the sailors' deputation at the Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (see the previous chapter), as well as in general the willing adoption of Spartacist slogans even among the sailors. In the meantime, their wages had become due, and Wels received the instruction from the government on 21 December to pay them 80,000 marks, but only once they had vacated the *Schloss* and handed over all their keys to him. Instead of the rooms in the *Schloss*, rooms were allocated to them in the *Marstall* situated across from it to the East, but provisions also made at the same time that, in line with an arrangement reached between the headquarters and the *Volksmarinedivision* on 13 December, from 1 January 1919 onwards wages would only be paid for 600 men.

The payment order from the government reads *verbatim*:

> Berlin, 21 December 1918.
>
> The *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* instructs the city headquarters to pay the *Volksmarinerat* [People's Navy Council] the sum of 80,000 (eighty thousand) marks, but only after vacating the *Schloss* and the *surrender of all keys to the city headquarters*. From 1 January 1919 onwards, payments will only be made for 600 men in accordance with the agreement between the city headquarters and the chairman of the Central Council of the *Marine* (Committee of 53) of 13 December.
>
> signed: Ebert, Haase, Landsberg, Barth, Dittmann, Scheidemann.[2]

Wels informed the sailors' leaders about this, and his adjutant Lieutenant Anton Fischer ordered them to appear at headquarters at 11:00 in the

morning on Sunday 22 December for the purpose of more detailed discussion. However, they did not come, but instead decided to circumvent Wels and once again approach the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*.

They did this on Monday 23 December. The member of the Executive Council Thost and two members of the *Marine* Committee appeared around 12 o'clock at the Reich Chancellery, and when a protocol was laid before them of the negotiations that had taken place between Wels and their representatives about their departure from the *Schloss* and the reduction in size of the division, they insisted that this was no jointly-prepared document but rather a one-sided and partly inaccurate reflection of the discussions, but in the main raised no serious further objections. Instead, apparently, after Ebert had calmly talked through the points of difference with them, they were satisfied with the assurance that those sailors who would be discharged would be incorporated where possible into the Republican *Sicherheitswehr* [Security Force], and promised to ensure that now the sailors would faithfully leave the *Schloss* and receive their pay in exchange for giving up their keys. All other points of difference would be discussed after the festive period "on 27 December" in a joint session. Thost and his companions arranged this. But instead of settling the matter in the headquarters, which was only five minutes away from the *Schloss*, as the directive required, the highly radical former Lieutenant Dorrenbach, who had been elected by the sailors as their "commander", ignored the headquarters, and brought the large casket that contained the keys along with a group of armed sailors to the Reich Chancellery and into the room of *Volksbeauftragter* Emil Barth, who was sympathetic to him. Since according to the division of functions in the cabinet not he but rather Fritz Ebert had to look after military affairs, Barth should at least have referred the sailors to him. But instead, he rang up Wels, informed him that the casket with the keys had been delivered to him, and told him now to pay out the wages to the sailors' representatives. Wels answered that the matter was not to be dealt with in this way, since under the directive of the *Volksbeauftragte* the keys were to have been delivered to him. An exchange of words took place between him and Barth about this over the telephone, whereby the sailors in Barth's room heard what he said to Wels, but not what Wels replied to him. Barth describes the conversation in his work *From the Workshop of the Revolution* as follows:

> *Wels*: No, it doesn't work like that! They have to bring the keys to me themselves or they won't get a *pfennig*. I've got them over a barrel now.

Me: Good grief, don't be stupid, and don't talk drivel, the keys are here, and you can come and collect them when we've decided who will hang onto them. The sailors say that they have brought them here because if they had gone to the headquarters that could easily have led to unpleasant confrontations. You know yourself just how popular you are with them, and it would certainly be the most distressing thing imaginable if it came to any unpleasant confrontations 24 hours before Christmas because of someone or other being imprudent.

Wels: That is all the same to me. I must have the keys before I hand over the money. I'm the one responsible for this.

Me: Well now permit me to tell you that I'll take on the responsibility, that should surely be enough for you. So pay up, yes?

Wels: No. Your responsibility is not enough for me, if Ebert says so, then yes.

Me: Dear God man! Now I can really understand that nobody can negotiate with you without wanting to tear their hair out! You are denying my trustworthiness, whether you like it or not. If the sailors weren't standing here, I would say something else to you. But remember this one thing. Ebert isn't worth an iota more or less than me. We are six *Volksbeauftragte* with completely equal rights. I have truly not yet flattered myself for a second about being a *Volksbeauftragter*. But that ends here. So I will take on responsibility, and you will give them the money!

Wels: I didn't want to insult you. But Ebert is in charge of military matters. So if he says to me: pay up, then I can pay, but if you say it, then the responsibility will always lie with me.

Me: Fine! I'll send the sailors to Ebert now, then if I can't settle the matter because you deny my right to do so, he can do it instead. *End*.[3]

"You heard what I said", Barth told the sailors, according to his account, "go to Ebert, he'll ring up Wels, then the matter is sorted." And he continues:

> The sailors were now understandably angry, shouted and cursed, and withdrew, taking their Ark of the Covenant with them.

Wels was held responsible by Independents and Spartacists for what now followed. They spoke of bureaucratically-inflexible obstinacy, without which things would not have come to the intensification of the conflict and the ensuing bloodshed. But if the circumstances at the time are taken into account, one will find Wels' behaviour understandable enough. He had received an instruction, signed by all the *Volksbeauftragte*, only to pay out the wages once the keys had been delivered to the headquarters.

To deviate from this because of a call from Barth must have seemed all the less advisable to him as only a few days had passed since he shocked even his colleagues from Independent Social Democracy in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* in the most disconcerting way possible through his conduct in the Council Congress. He belonged to the left, *Spartakus*-oriented wing of the Independents, as did the aforenamed Dorrenbach. But from this quarter the exit of the Independents from the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* was already being loudly demanded in numerous gatherings, while in the organ of the Spartacists themselves the violent removal of the Ebert-Haase government was preached ever more uncompromisingly. So if Dorrenbach, in contradiction to the direction given by the government, deliberately bypassed Wels and handed in the keys to Barth, who officially had nothing to do with the matter, that had to puzzle Wels, and it should have been Barth's task as a member of the government, who had also co-signed the directive, to make clear to Dorrenbach the inappropriateness of his behaviour, and to warn him to proceed in an orderly fashion. Without preserving a certain order and discipline, there can be no communal life; these are no less necessary during the Revolution than in the normal run of things.

Barth acted otherwise. We can by all means believe that did not do so with any bad intention. But no reader of his book can resist the impression that he was possessed by a high degree of egotism, which must be called pathological, which robbed him of the capacity to judge objectively those who thought differently to him, but which lulled him into fateful illusions about the possibilities of the Revolution. According to a report by Wels about these events, published in *Vorwärts* on 28 December 1918, he asked Barth at the end of their conversation to accompany the sailors to Ebert. It is hard to see why Barth did not do so. After he had received the sailors and seen how embittered they had become because of the remarks he made over the telephone in front of them, it should have been obvious enough to him not to simply leave these agitated people to their own devices. According to his own account, he had expressed himself in such a way that they had to assume that this was all a chicanery on Wels' part. In the fact that he did nothing himself to put the matter back onto the right tracks lies the greater responsibility for what now followed and its dire effects.

As Barth describes matters further, the sailors went from him to Ebert, did not find him in his office nor elsewhere in the building, and, he writes,

> that means for the sailors that they could not get their money. Then they said to themselves, we have now been running from pillar to post for three days, we have now had enough. They went briskly to the guards—those were likewise sailors who had not yet received any pay—and said: occupy the Reich Chancellery and the central telephone office, until you receive further instructions from us. It was not their intention to arrest the *Volksbeauftragte*, but only to blockade them until they had fetched their money from the headquarters. But that it came to the blockade of the Reich Chancellery, to bloodshed before the headquarters, etc., that was solely the fault of Ebert and Landsberg.

It is not the task of this work to deal with writings like Barth's individually and polemically. The cited passage, especially its closing lines, let us recognise well enough Barth's line of thought and the tendentious way in which the former *Volksbeauftragter* outlines the motivations of people with whom he had a dispute. That the sailors and their leader Dorrenbach are supposed to have searched for Ebert throughout the whole building before they undertook the violent act described already sounds highly unlikely for the reason that they immediately found Ebert after they had occupied the telephone office and instructed the guards as depicted. He was in his rooms, which were only 50 paces away from his office, where he and Landsberg were having their lunch, when very shortly after the events in Barth's room two fully-armed sailors burst in on them and revealed to the two *Volksbeauftragte* that they and their comrades had received the order from their commander Dorrenbach to shut the gates of the Reich Chancellery, not to let anyone enter or leave the building, as well as to keep the Chancellery's central telephone office occupied until their other comrades had reached the headquarters and there compel the fulfilment of their justified demands. In other words, that the members of the government be locked in the Reich Chancellery and cut off from telephone contact with the outside world. Ebert asked his secretary to see which other *Volksbeauftragte* were still in the building. The only one he met was Emil Barth. He writes that when the official came to him, he asked him to come to Ebert immediately. He, Barth, had thereupon arranged a new meeting with Undersecretary von Möllendorf, who was with him at the time, and then gone to find Ebert, in whose room, apart from Landsberg, now Scheidemann and Undersecretary Baake, the Chief of the Reich Chancellery, now also sat. When Barth entered, Ebert was running hither and thither around the room. Let us hear Barth continue:

All four of them looked at me quite perplexedly, and I them.
"You called?", I said to Ebert.
Ebert: "Me? No!"
Me: "Now don't make jokes! Krüger was just with me!"
Landsberg: "Well, colleague Barth, we just wanted to see if you wanted to keep us company."
Me: "Keep you company?"
Landsberg: "Do you actually know nothing about what's happened? Nothing?"
Me: "Please, don't speak in riddles!"
Landsberg: "Well, then I want to inform you that we are extraordinarily glad that you're keeping us company in our imprisonment."
Me: "What? Imprisonment? Since when have you started making jokes?"
Landsberg: "I see you really don't know anything, so I'll explain it to you. We have been arrested by the sailors. By our own guards. Nobody may leave the building, and the central telephone office is locked off. So you are our fellow sufferer of fate."
Me: "But don't talk nonsense. Do you have a telephone here? No? Well then I'll make a call from my own room. I have to convince myself of this before I'll believe it."
I then went to my room, took the receiver, and on being told that the line was closed, I said to the man he should not talk nonsense, that I had to be put through. Then I was connected.

At the same time, Barth continues, the Chairman of the Soldiers' Council of Potsdam, Klawunde, had called him on the second receiver in his office and informed him that just now some regiments of infantry and cavalry, who had already been on standby since the morning, had now been shipped off to Berlin, apparently at the behest of the government, to put down a Spartacist *putsch*. Was that right? Barth insisted that that was nonsense, anybody who thought of bloodshed on Christmas Eve must be mad. He immediately ordered Klawunde to do whatever he could to prevent the departure of troops to Berlin, then went back to Ebert and asked who had given the instruction in Potsdam. Their answer was: "We don't know anything about this!" But when he asked Ebert to immediately call up all the military posts to ask for an explanation and give countermanding orders, he answered that it was out of the question to be constantly at the mercy of a handful of elements, they could not constantly sit on a powderkeg. An end had to be put to this situation. He, Barth, protested against this, and after some exchange of words Ebert promised to ensure

that no more troops would come from Potsdam, and that those who were arriving would be sent back. From 6 o'clock in the evening onwards, the cabinet session then took place, in which Ebert and his colleagues resisted any attempt to revisit the sailors' affair with the argument that this had now been settled; Labour Minister Bauer had presented and explained the ordinance about tariff agreements, workers' and employees' committees, and the resolution of labour disputes; all of Barth's counterproposals had been rejected by five votes against his; and then by the same majority the permanent appointment of Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau as leader of the Foreign Office was resolved. Although in the meantime Ebert and his colleagues had found out what had happened by now at the headquarters, they said no word about this during the session, and—although Barth had made them aware of the gravity of the situation and related his concerns to them—even Dittmann and Haase had immediately left after the session without telling him where. Of course, he did not ask them about that either.

This account is incorrect for the most part. Neither had Scheidemann been in the Reich Chancellery that afternoon, nor did the cabinet session described take place on the day in question. Haase and Dittmann too were out of the building for the entire afternoon and evening, which was only freed by the sailors' guarding it very late. Certainly, the two *Volksbeauftragte* of the Social-Democratic Party were not as severely cut off from the outside world as Dorrenbach and his comrades intended. There was still a direct telephone connection that he remained unaware of with the Supreme *Heer* Command, located in Kassel. Hence, Ebert had informed General Gröner, who at the time was in charge of it, that he and Landsberg were being kept prisoner, and asked him to give orders to compel their release, if necessary militarily.

Beforehand, he had—although Barth and the others who have described these events from the side of the partial or full Spartacists have kept silent about this—made one more attempt to reach an amicable solution. Through the sailors' guard, he called on the sailors in the *Schloss* once again to send representatives to him. They complied with his request. Dorrenbach appeared with two companions, and they began to negotiate again. The accompanying sailors showed a strong inclination to follow Ebert's urgent exhortations. But Dorrenbach remained obstinate, and so the negotiation ended without a result, which however meant a worsening of the situation in the circumstances. Hence Ebert's request to Gröner. The former could also have entered into telephone contact with the outside world in another way too. One must remind oneself that from the Reich Chancellery a way

leads to the Reich Office for Foreign Affairs through various courts, which was not occupied either. So it was possible also eventually to inform the city commander Wels about the occupation of the Reich Chancellery and the blockade of its telephone office. As he explains in a very plain but precisely for that reason confidence-inspiring report in *Vorwärts* on 28 December 1918, Wels assumed after the telephone conversation with Barth that the latter had, in accordance with his request, taken the sailors to Ebert, and now awaited instructions from him. But they did not come, and when after many futile calls he was finally informed by back channels that the building was occupied by rebellious sailors, who were letting nobody in or out, he headed to the neighbouring quarters of the Republican *Soldatenwehr* and other government troops, and instructed troops to be dispatched by these to the Reich Chancellery. He then hurried back to the headquarters, and was just about to leave it shortly afterwards in order to supervise the troops in the Wilhelmstraße himself, when as he was exiting the building sailors met him with Dorrenbach at their head and prevented him from leaving by insisting that they had to talk with him without delay. They then went to his room, where Wels next asked Dorrenbach how he had come to holding the Reich government captive. Dorrenbach gave an evasive answer. To Wels' next question of where the keys were now, whether Barth still had them or whether they had been handed over to Ebert, he received the reply that they were now back at the *Schloss* again. He then answered that he could then also not pay out the eighty thousand marks without disobeying the explicit order of the Reich government. In the meantime, more and more sailors had barged into the room, everyone was shouting across one another, and a chaotic noise reigned, when suddenly shots rang out from the street, which came from the area of the university, which lay approximately a hundred paces diagonally opposite. Wels sprang, he writes, onto the balcony of the headquarters, before which great masses of soldiers had gathered, and shouted in the direction of the arsenal, which was occupied by security guards: "Cease fire, do not shoot, we are negotiating!" The shout was passed on and the firing stopped. Sadly this did not remedy the disaster that this had caused.

What had happened down below?

Around 6 o'clock in the evening, several hundred armed sailors had advanced in troops from two sides, namely from the South, from the Charlottenstraße, which runs into Unter den Linden, and the Oberwallstraße, which runs into the so-called Franz-Joseph Square

between the *Opernhaus* and the *Kronprinzenpalais*, and from the North, from the Schloss Bridge, had formed chains that blocked the streets from Unter den Linden to the *Lustgarten*, while several hundred others took up positions before the headquarters, i.e., surrounded it. At that, the soldiers' council of the Republican *Soldatenwehr*, stationed in the *Kronprinzenpalais*, which had been informed by Wels, went into action, as did the security guards in the arsenal, the building of the former Royal Library, and in the *Palais Friedrich Wilhelm* (Wilhelm I's former palace), who had likewise been warned by Wels. The leaders of these divisions immediately moved onto the street with machine guns and set them up there. At the same time, the soldiers' councils of the Berlin garrison were notified by telephone, and dispatched a company of soldiers each in trucks to the headquarters. Likewise, two armoured cars with machine guns, as well as several cars equipped for battle, were sent out from the headquarters itself, and took up position in the Oberwallstraße. All of these government troops, if one may call them that, refrained from attacking the sailors, and these too avoided starting any shooting.

But shooting did break out when a truck that did not belong to the headquarters drove into Unter den Linden from the Charlottenstraße, turned in the direction of the headquarters, and, without its driver taking any notice of the shouts of the cordon of sailors, continued driving. This prompted the sailors, when the truck tried to drive through their chain, to open up some rapid fire on it from their carbines, which probably only consisted of warning shots, since nobody was injured by it. However, these shots led the team of an armoured car, which precisely at that moment also turned from the Charlottenstraße into Unter den Linden, to quickly open up serious rapid fire on the sailors posted in front of the headquarters, by which one of them was killed and three heavily injured. This provoked incredible embitterment among the already agitated sailors. A number of them forced their way into the headquarters through doors and windows, their carbines around their shoulders, with the cry "Down with Wels". Arriving in Wels' office, the intruders belaboured him with insults and threats, and some of them would have liked to lynch him on the spot. He just managed to answer a telephone call by General Lequis of the *Gardeschützenkavallerie* that he was shut in the headquarters and could not undertake anything from it, and asked the general to do what was needed from his position. Then he was surrounded by sailors, who under continued threats demanded of him the payment of 80,000 marks as well as a written statement that the *Volksmarinedivision* was recognised

as a unit permanently stationed in Berlin. He did not agree to the latter, but said that he was prepared to pay out the money in the hope of convincing the angry sailors to withdraw. But that did not happen. They raged on more loudly, whereby personalities set the tone who had never had anything to do with the workers' movement, and eventually they declared Wels, his adjutant Fischer, and the secretary of the headquarters Dr. Bongartz to be "prisoners", and moved with them to the *Marstall* to keep them in custody, or, as some cried, to "condemn" them. As he was transported, Wels was mistreated in an extremely brutal way by several of the sailors who kept him surrounded, who according to his report had also been joined by security troops under chief constable Eichhorn's command. While Fischer and Dr. Bongartz were released comparatively quickly, Wels was dragged in the dark from room to room, among them the bureau of the *Schloss*, where the acting commander of the *Volksmarinedivision*, Radtke, a member of Independent Social Democracy, did his best to deter the sailors from committing violence against him. For this, one of the sailors' "wild" leaders shouted at him in the presence of Wels that he would make sure that he did not come out alive, otherwise he would put a bullet through the head of Radtke himself. Since he saw that at that moment he could not achieve anything on the spot, Radtke headed to the headquarters and discussed the situation with Lieutenant Fischer. In the meantime, Wels was shut in a cell on the ground floor and told he would pay with his life. After Radtke's return, he was put in a livable room at his behest, and Radtke told the sailors that an understanding had been achieved, and that Wels should now only be regarded as in protective custody.

For the following had also happened late that evening. Shortly after shots were fired at the sailors by the team in the armoured car and had claimed their victims, troops of the embittered soldiers had headed to the Reich Chancellery and again took prisoner the government members who were still in it. But then, troops of the Berlin garrison and the Republican *Soldatenwehr* had moved in to protect the government against the sailors. For this purpose, they took up a demonstrative position in front of the Chancellery, but refrained from any attack on the sailors, and these too now took a stance of wait-and-see. A commission of the Committee of Five of the Republican *Soldatenwehr* with Brutus Molkenbuhr at its head went to *Volksbeauftragter* Ebert, informed him that this *Soldatenwehr* and also the greater part of the troops of the Berlin garrison excoriated the sailors' conduct in the strongest terms, and were not minded to let the

putsch carry on by any means, but were prepared if necessary to free Wels by force. Ebert cautioned them to prudent conduct, so that bloodshed could be avoided, as the government hoped to have the prisoner released by negotiating with the sailors' division without it. Molkenbuhr and the other members of the deputation thereupon consulted with the soldiers' council of the Republican *Soldatenwehr*, then Molkenbuhr drove to the *Marstall* and began the negotiations of the *Soldatenwehr* with the *Volksmarinedivision*. These were continued in the Reich Chancellery before Ebert and Landsberg, who were then also joined by Barth, and had as a result the agreement that garrison troops and sailors would leave the Reich Chancellery at the same time in different directions, so that only the usual protective guard remained. Ebert made the following remarks to the troops as they withdrew:

> For the moment, I do not want to go into the events that have taken place today. I only want to observe the fact that the government was detained in the Reich Chancellery building by its *own guards*, and nobody allowed to leave it. The central telephone office was occupied, so that all telephone conversations were made impossible. Later I managed to persuade the sailors to *withdraw*.
>
> We have further observed that the sailors did leave the building. But the other troops must now also leave at the same time as well. I ask you to do everything to *avoid any bloodshed*. We have shed so much blood in this war that it would simply be madness to bring about new bloodshed, for which nobody could take responsibility. So go back to your quarters.

That happen after 10 o'clock in the evening. At 11 o'clock, the Reich Chancellery rang the *Schloss* and *Marstall* and asked whether Wels had now been freed. The answer was negative. At 12 o'clock at night, the same thing happened with the same outcome. Likewise at 1 o'clock. In the meantime, the government had told the troops whose approach had been reported from Potsdam, to go back. Finally, after 1 o'clock, Radtke called from the *Schloss* and informed them that Wels was still being held in custody by embittered sailors. To the question of whether Wels was in mortal danger, Radtke answered that that was not the case at the moment, but his life could not be guaranteed in light of the mood among the sailors. That sounded so ominous that Ebert, after discussing this with Landsberg and Scheidemann, who were still in the Reich Chancellery, called War Minister Scheüch, made him aware of what had happened, and asked him to do what was necessary to free Wels and suppress the sailors.

Nothing should be hushed up or glossed over here. This request was a fateful step in two respects, military *and* political: militarily, because through it those who had given the order took upon themselves some of the responsibility for the measures that the military now took; politically, because it took place without the inclusion of the *Volksbeauftragte* of Independent Social Democracy and already for that reason were likely to worsen their already tense situation with it.

But one should recall the situation. The government was confronted with an unmistakeable rebellion. And not, as Barth and others portray it, a rebellion that had simply grown from out of the "silly prank" of political neophytes. One may readily agree that the majority of the sailors did not understand enough of politics to fully gauge the political moment of the steps they had taken, and to grasp that whoever tramples underfoot the most elementary duties of discipline in the way that they had done himself provokes his own violent suppression under all forms of government. But the sailors acted under the leadership of a leader who as a former officer could not for a moment be in any doubt what all his actions meant. Dorrenbach was later shot by military types in circumstances in the face of which the expression "cowardly murder" does not seem too harsh. But that cannot be a reason to skate over and understate the great political responsibility that he placed upon himself in those days. As difficult as this may be, if one still admits the possibility that his approach that afternoon with the casket of keys and the shutting-down of the Reich Chancellery was simply fuelled by a momentary outburst, then such an assumption is impossible with regard to the encirclement of the headquarters and the ensuing blackmailing of Wels that was carried out in the evening. There, as the arrival of the sailors in troops from different sides at the same time indicates, things were proceeding according to a premeditated plan, which doubtless was down to Dorrenbach. What sort of influence he wielded over the sailors in the *Marinedivision* at the time emerges from the statements of Alpers and Milewski, who were interrogated as witnesses in May 1919 in the Ledebour Trial, and who at that time had belonged to the *Marinedivision*. Here, what is especially notable is that both stressed that Dorrenbach almost never outlined his intentions to the sailors as a group, but only ever dealt with individuals. So one may assume that the greater majority of the sailors indeed did not know about any plan that evening as well. But the proceedings that took place in front of and inside the headquarters must have appeared as the result of such a plan, as a stitch-up, to Ebert and his colleagues. And it is clear that the agitation that they

provoked among them must have increased vastly further when during the night initially no news whatsoever could be received for hours about the fate that had befallen Wels in the *Schloss*, and then Radtke's message came through, which was even more disconcerting in its vagueness. At that moment, it must have seemed to them as an urgent requirement of duty to free their fellow campaigner—who had been placed in so important and at the same time dangerous a post, and whom the *Rote Fahne* denounced to the masses as a bloodhound because of the confrontation on 6 December in almost every issue—from this situation. But related to that was the task of bringing the rebelling sailors to finally clear the *Schloss* in accordance with the government's resolution, which after all had been unanimously passed. As things lay, it was not to be expected that this was to be achieved without involving government troops. Hence what was troubling was not the fact that the military was called on again, but rather that the military commanders were not given a socialist to accompany them as a consultant, who knew how one should deal with socialistically-oriented workers.

So the military types acted "how they understood" that they should. Beforehand, the following took place as well.

Soon after Radtke had given Ebert the aforementioned news, in light of the raging of some of the sailors, Radtke, Milewski, and other likeminded members of the sailors' division were overcome by serious fears that these sailors would still kill Wels. In this perception, they decided to call on a politician who enjoyed particular respect among the radical workers, and since in their opinion this was true of Georg Ledebour, they rang him in the middle of the night, and after he agreed to help, some of them collected him in a car and brought him to the *Marstall.* Having arrived on the spot, Ledebour spoke forcefully to the angry ones among the sailors, who shouted again and again: "Wels will not be freed, he will be beaten to death", and after much back and forth eventually managed to persuade them to declare themselves prepared to release Wels under certain conditions. According to the description that Ledebour gives of the events at the time at his trial, a commission was then chosen at his recommendation that should negotiate with the government about this question, and to which apart from himself Dorrenbach belonged as well.

But before it got to this negotiation, the intervention of the military against the sailors' division took place. War Minister Scheüch had handed the execution of the assignment Ebert had given him over to Lieutenant-General Lequis of the *Gardeschützenkavallerie*, and around

morning on 24 December, Lequis had mustered the greater part of the military encamped in and around Berlin for a battle should it become necessary. As dawn broke, Unter den Linden resembled, it says in the report of a bourgeois newspaper,

> a gigantic army camp. From all sides the companies approached, partly on foot, partly in trucks, led by the soldiers' councils. The troops were equipped for an assault, i.e., with steel helmets, knapsacks, and bayonets fixed. The Potsdam Division approached together with its artillery, the troops with hand grenades on their belts. The staff of the government troops was set up in the *Palais* of the old Kaiser (Wilhelm I) and in the *Prinzessinnen-Palais*. Here the leaders of the troops met, and they resolved to make one more attempt to reach an understanding.

But what did this attempt at an understanding consist of? Let us hear the report further:

> A detachment of 5 men was sent to the *Marstall*. At 7:50 these delegates arrived there under a white flag, were received by the sailors, and led to the soldiers' council. The leaders of the Soldiers' Defence Force declared curtly:
>
> "We request a full surrender of the sailors, whose justified demands will be immediately fulfilled. Within ten minutes, all the sailors in the *Marstall* and the *Schloss* are to form up unarmed in the *Schloss* square (between the *Marstall* and the *Schloss*). We give you ten minutes to think this over. If the white flag is not raised after this time, we will fire on the *Schloss* and *Marstall* with artillery."

Now, that was no attempt at an understanding, but nothing more than an abrupt demand for meek capitulation. And since on top of that the message was delivered by a beardless young lieutenant in the usual lieutenant's tone of voice, this could have no other effect than to enrage the sailors once again in the utmost. But the military was in a huge rush to start shooting. The detachment was with the sailors at 7:50, and had, as another report says, found the *Marstall* bristling with machine guns, and since the sailors, in understandable defiance, did not produce the white flag, at 8 o'clock on the dot the troops were given the sign to let loose. Let us hear the cited report continue:

> At quarter to 8, all entries to the *Schloss* square and to get out of the *Schloss* were blocked off. Since the sailors did not willingly leave the buildings,

fierce firing began at 8 o'clock. The troops had set up two machine guns on the *Schinkelplatz*, and several on the *Werderscher Markt* and Oberwallstraße. The sailors faced the troops with 5 machine guns and one heavy gun. At that, the commander of the *Gardekavalleriedivision Oberst* von Tschirschky und Bögendorff let the artillery unlimber; on the *Schloss* Bridge, in front of the *Schloss*, and on the *Werderscher Markt* one 10.5cm howitzer each was set up.

The first shot at the *Schloss* hit between the windows of the first floor and tore a hole several metres wide; the machine gun set up there fell into the rubble. Further shots hit the ground floor at the level of the White Hall. Both of the two great gates are heavily damaged, the stonemasonry destroyed. Also the historic balcony of the *Schloss*, from which the Kaiser held his address in August 1914, is badly blown away.

At the same time began the bombardment of the *Marstall* from the *Werderscher Markt*. The sailors shot from the windows with hidden machine guns onto the advancing troops. The bombardment is increased from the Französische Straße as well, which the *Garde-Kürassier* Regiment had moved with light guns. The firefight raged back and forth until 10 o'clock; then a lull entered in. From one window of the *Marstall* a flag was waved, which they at first took to be a trick by the sailors to draw the troops in closer. When a detachment of sailors appeared in front of the *Marstall*, firing ceased completely. From the Französische Straße came the commander of the *Kavallerie* Brigade, *Oberst* von Tschirschky, with a government representative in a vehicle; a soldier in front of them with a white flag on the bayonet of his gun. The vehicle stops in front of the *Marstall*, and *Oberst* von Tschirschky and his adjutant enter. After a quarter of an hour they come back out preceded by a white flag, surrounded by the negotiating committee of the sailors. The negotiations seemed to have led to the handover of the sailors' division, because shortly after ten o'clock first individual sailors, then entire troops left the stable building without their weapons. A part of the troops also withdrew, and shortly after 11 o'clock the general withdrawal began.

In the meantime, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* had met for a session and resolved to order the military to end the shooting. Emil Barth describes the relevant proceeding as follows in his work, which was cited already, and which is dominated by the tendency to shift all the blame for the bloodshed onto the *Volksbeauftragte* belonging to the Majority socialists:

Ebert tried to get through, and when he had reached the War Minister, the following conversation took place.

Ebert: "Good morning, Excellency. Ebert here. We have just heard word that an attack by the *Gardekavallerieschützen* Division is taking place on the *Schloss* and the *Marstall*. Since we know nothing about these events, I want to ask you urgently on behalf of the whole cabinet to immediately ensure that further bloodshed does not take place." — — — — — — — — — — — —

"Yes, it is a unanimous decision by the cabinet, and we ask that hostilities cease straightaway and negotiations take place." — — — — — — — — Ebert: "I thank you".

There now came Thost from the 53-man *Marine* committee, who asked for a certificate of authorisation to be issued so that he could mediate between the two parties. After Landsberg's initial resistance, he obtained it. Then came Cohen as the Chairman of the Central Council and Richard Müller as Chairman of the Berlin Executive Council, and likewise requested authorisations to negotiate. They received them as well.

Then came the members of the 53-man committee from the Jade, Elbe, and Kiel areas to find out how this had happened and who bore the blame, so that they could summon the sailors of Wilhelmshaven, Lehrte, Hamburg, and Kiel to protect their comrades.

Ebert explained to all of them, as he had to us, that he himself was completely surprised by this, and could not give them any information, but would press for clarification as quickly as possible.

The session of the *Volksbeauftragte* continued on its course, while Cohen, Müller, Thost, and the sailors headed to the university, where the discussion suggested by Ledebour during the night was taking place. From the military, Lieutenant-General von Hoffmann took part in it, with whom Ledebour had already personally talked along with other military types, according to his account in the court discussion of 20 May 1919. He and his comrades found, he reported, "thoroughly creditable accommodation" with Hoffmann, so that a satisfying arrangement was reached.

The justified demands of the *Marinedivision* for a payment of their wages was approved. The sailors said that they were prepared to vacate the *Schloss*, which the *Marinedivision* had occupied besides the *Marstall*, and Lieutenant-General Hoffmann declared himself ready, in response to our suggestions, without the *Volksmarinedivision* having thought to pose this demand, to withdraw his troops from Berlin.

Since this discussion took place *after* Ebert had ordered the War Minister in the name of the government to put an end to the shooting, which Ledebour certainly could not know, there was barely any question of a particular accommodation by Herr von Hoffmann. Neither did he have the order nor the right to approve the payment of wages to the sailors, nor was there any occasion for this, since this approval had already been given long beforehand on the part of the government. In general, some military types seem to have played quite an ambiguous role in those days. They interpreted the order to do whatever was necessary to clear the *Schloss* and free Wels in the crassest possible way. But if ever they were taken to task about the shooting, they insisted that what they did was taking place quite against their wishes on behalf of the government to which they were tied. By this, they contributed much to intensifying the suspicion of the social democrats of the two tendencies towards one another.

From the other side, the Spartacists ensured that the fighting did not immediately come to an end.

The bourgeois report cited earlier, which in the main tallies with the reports of socialist papers as regards the facts of the matter, continues:

> But the calm did not last for long, and the cause of the new fighting that carried on into the evening seems to have been the open intervention of the *Spartakus* League. But the Liebknecht group had certainly not been inactive up to that point either. Already at quarter past nine, fighting had broken out at the *Lustgarten* and in the court of the *Schloss* between government troops and the *Spartakus* League. Near the stock exchange, about 300 *Spartakus* people had gathered, armed with revolvers, who had broken through the cordon at the stock exchange and now stormed towards the *Schloss* with a placard "Down with the government! All power to the proletariat!". At the *Lustgarten*, they managed to steal two machineguns from the third column of the Potsdam *Uhlans*. With loud yells they now poured across the *Lustgarten*, through the fourth gate, and into the *Schloss*, and tried to overrun the guards at the *Schlosshof*. But the government troops had already noticed this incident. A company forced its way from the headquarters into the *Schloss*, while teams of stormtroops in the *Schloss* hurried down the stairs and threw themselves at the *Spartakus* people, who had already begun to plunder the place. A leader of the *Soldatenwehr* ordered the intruders immediately to clear out of the *Schloss* before he gave the order to fire. But when the intruders made as if to put up a fight, the soldiers charged at them, bayonets fixed. Amid loud screams, the plunderers fled, and dispersed across the *Schlossplatz*, from where they were chased on by the guards stationed there.

The identification of the Spartacists with the plunderers contained in the closing sentences was naturally strenuously rejected by the press of the former and papers close to them. As a factual basis it has also merely the circumstance that, once the cordon was broken through, all manner of other street folk followed in the wake of the Spartacists, among them doubtless also insalubrious elements, which seek to use any opportunity for plundering and the like.

But this was not the only evil outcome that followed this breach of the cordon. The chief constable of Berlin at the time, Emil Eichhorn, who, as remarked before, belonged to the radical wing of Independent Social Democracy, when the shooting was taking place, took the opportunity to send out the security troops at his disposal, armed with revolvers, with the task of preventing the fighting from spilling over into the other parts of the city. Of these security troops, however, a significant part took the side of the insurrectionary sailors, and came to their aid in troops by falling on the back of the government troops or forcing themselves between them and crippling the strength of their attack. In the camp of the government party, they saw in that an indication of their support for the insurrectionists, deliberately organised by Eichhorn—since a claim of his was reported, which he later rejected as entirely untrue, that apart from this he had provided weapons to the Spartacists in the court of the constabulary—and so an embitterment against Eichhorn took root that would lead to even bloodier fighting a short time after. The immediate result was favourable for the sailors. Among the ranks of the government troops, demoralisation had set in as a result of their infiltration by the civil public, part of them would not have been up for continuing the fighting, others would have even allowed themselves to be persuaded to go over to the insurrectionists under the influence of their belabouring by *Spartakus* people and likeminded elements. But among these too the enthusiasm for fighting had receded.

As a result of all these proceedings, the agreement that was eventually reached was given such a form that it was presented by some as a capitulation by the sailors, by others as a capitulation by the government before the sailors. In fact, the sailors received nothing that the government had not already repeatedly fundamentally assured them of, while the government distances itself from any investigation of the originators and abettors of the uprising, and punishing them. The wording of the agreement is as follows:

1. The *Volksmarinedivision* obligates itself to vacate the *Schloss* immediately once the agreement of 18 December is carried out. In accor-

dance with it, the sailors' division has a right to bureau rooms in the *Marstall*.

2. The sailors will be attached to the Republican *Soldatenwehr*, which is under the command of the headquarters. The form of this attachment remains reserved for a later agreement.
3. The sailors obligate themselves never again to participate in actions against the government in future. Differences of opinion are always to be resolved by the way of negotiation through the appropriate channels. The division of general command Lequis will be withdrawn immediately. The alarm-readiness of the Berlin troops and the sailors' division will be lifted immediately. The sailors and soldiers will return to quarters. Commander Wels is to be released immediately.

First individually and then in groups, the majority of the sailors now leave the *Marstall*. They had lost nine dead, and the number of their heavily-wounded was quite significantly higher. To that came a further 20 dead and twice as many wounded from the ranks of their Spartacist and other fellow partisans. The government troops suffered 2 dead and 2 wounded.

Traffic was now freed up again, and masses of people scurried up Unter den Linden to the scene of the fighting. All manner of speeches were held in front of improvised piles, most of them in the spirit of the radical opposition. Reports differ about the character of a speech that Georg Ledebour held around 12 o'clock from a beer wagon in front of the University. Some describe it as cautioning calm, others as rabble-rousing. Here too the truth will lie somewhere in between. According to his own account, Ledebour held his speech to the crowd that was milling about in front of the University during the negotiations described above at the wish of officers of the *Gardeschütze*-Division, in order to avert new clashes, and others also confirm that he encouraged the crowd to disperse. But that does not rule out that he peppered this speech with harsh attacks on the Majority socialists in the government, and, as a series of reports say, spoke in favour of the sailors retaining their weapons. He and others held other very ferocious speeches against Ebert and his colleagues that evening, and in a meeting of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, the exit of the Independents from the government is demanded ever more tempestuously. They would be traitors to the Revolution, it is declared, if they sat any longer in a government with these "murderous lads" [*Mordbuben*].

The air is overcharged with material for conflict. On the next day, actual Christmas Day, *Spartakus* people, radical members of the sailors' division, and likeminded types, which had peeled off from a demonstration procession, occupy the premises of *Vorwärts* in the afternoon by forcibly driving away the guards stationed in front of the *Vorwärts* building, because it had brought out an article that morning in which it sharply highlighted the behaviour of the insurrectionary sailors and the fault of those who stood behind them and incited them to conflict. A temporary editorial staff is installed, and a flier is printed that informs readers that the former *Vorwärts*, the "lying reptile", which in conjunction with the bourgeois press was making efforts to deprive the proletariat of the fruits of the Revolution, would now appear as *Roter Vorwärts*, and "proclaim the hotly anticipated truth to the people". When the editors came into the office on the evening of the 26th, they were told they had no more business being there, that the paper that had been robbed from the revolutionary proletariat of Berlin two years previously had been returned to it again, and when the editor-in-chief Friedrich Stampfer raises an objection to this act of violence, he is taken into custody in the *Marstall*.

In the meantime, negotiations had begun between leading personalities of the participating socialist parties and the government. Chief constable Eichhorn had stepped in and in the first instance arranged for the *Vorwärts* print to be cleared, and eventually a gathering of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and representatives under the influence of leading figures in Independent Social Democracy decided that *Vorwärts* be set free again. But the editors had to obligate themselves to publish the following statement at the top of its next issue:

> The gathering of Revolutionary Shop Steward and representatives of Greater Berlin on 26 December 1918 has complete understanding for the outrage among the working masses that led to the occupation of the *Vorwärts* business on 25 December. The tremendous breach of right that was committed two years ago against the Berlin working class is found all the more provocative by the revolutionary working class today, since *Vorwärts* in recent times has traduced in the most shameless way all the honest and determined revolutionary circles as well as the *Volksmarinedivision*.
>
> The Revolutionary Shop Stewards hence consider the lesson taught the *Vorwärts* people well-earned, but they consider the behaviour against *Vorwärts* not to be the appropriate occasion to take up the comprehensive final struggle against open and clandestine counterrevolution.

> The gathering of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards hence recommends giving up the occupation of the *Vorwärts* building. It obligates itself to commit all its forces to drive forward revolutionary development and lead to its end the struggle for socialism. Included in this struggle is self-evidently the struggle against the Ebert government and its lackeys in *Vorwärts*.
>
> The gathering of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards recognises the right of the Berlin workers to *Vorwärts*. It is of the opinion that *Vorwärts*' affairs in this revolutionary period must immediately be regulated by the Executive Council of the working class of Greater Berlin in this vein.
>
> The Revolutionary Shop Stewards and representatives of the major enterprises of Greater Berlin.

This statement appeared in the morning edition of *Vorwärts* on 27 December 1918, and the editors followed it immediately with a short notice in which they say that from the declarations of the Commission of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards "they had become convinced that the occupation of *Vorwärts* was caused neither by them nor by the leadership of the *Spartakus* League".

But then there follows an article "The standpoint of the editors", in which these outline their view with sharp objectivity but in calm language. It says there:

> It would be perfectly within our rights to answer strong words with strong words. We will restrict ourselves to correcting facts. — … We are supposed to have insulted the honestly revolutionary circles in a shameless way. We consider those circles "*honestly revolutionary*" that cleave to the achievements of the Revolution. The greatest achievement of the Revolution is that the whole people shall decide about its fate itself in future. We consider attempts to deny it this right, to frustrate the elections for the *Nationalversammlung*, to be counterrevolutionary and only serving the most extreme reaction. Such attempts—just like the fantastical plan to forcibly replace the current government with a government by Liebknecht-Rosa Luxemburg, which would only have a small handful of workers behind it—conjure up the threat of civil war. But to those who toy with civil war we will say again and again that they are corruptors of the people, and we will advise our comrades again and again to defend to the utmost the people's right of self-determination on all sides. If we should also use harsh words in doing so, then those who they affect should not be too sensitive, since they also do not take others' sensitivities into consideration—see above!
>
> *Vorwärts* remains what it was, the central organ of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, which is subjected to no other control than that of its own party authorities, its editors remain unchanged, likewise its outlook.

> But its right to be able to express its opinion freely it will hopefully not have to especially defend a second time in revolutionary, republican Germany.

The latter would not come true. The way in which the party leadership of the then-still not divided Social-Democratic Party took *Vorwärts* out of the hands of the opposition, which predominated in Berlin, in 1916, the writer of this work does not consider correct even today. But in light of the practices of the High Command in the marches, vested with unlimited authority over the press, it is questionable whether the paper—which after all was not just the organ of the Berlin party members, but at the same time the central organ of the entire party—could even have survived as an organ of the opposition that was fighting against the party's war policy, and whether a solution that would have satisfied both sides was even still possible at all at the time. Further, in December 1918, after both factions had founded their own organs in Berlin, the Independents *Freiheit* and the *Spartakus* people *Die Rote Fahne*, the question was fundamentally now only of significance for retrospective judgment. In a special notice, Friedrich Stampfer observed that on 9 November 1918, he had made a proposal to certain noteworthy Independents to reach a new agreement about the editorship of the paper. "The Independents were not responsive to this", he writes, "but preferred to launch their own paper, whereby, properly considered, the two sides' interests were probably best served."

In the same issue of *Vorwärts*, the three *Volksbeauftragte* belonging to the faction of the Majority socialists published their report about the clashes of 23 and 24 December, as these appeared from their standpoint. Overall an impressive piece of writing, which in pithy sentences summarises the events described above that the bloody confrontation had had as a result, and from which two facts proceed with compelling cogency: firstly, that up to the moment where during the night from 23 to 24 December the report came from the *Schloss* that Wels' life could no longer be guaranteed, the government had done its best, despite repeated provocation, to prevent acts of violence and come to a satisfactory understanding with the sailors; and secondly that every time that such an agreement had been reached, Dorrenbach and his backers had stirred up new conflicts through their actions. The report emphasises that the leaders of the *Volksmarinedivision* who negotiated with the government wanted to establish unity, and proved this after the street fighting afresh through their assurance "not to participate in any further action whatsoever against the government". But who was it who did not want to let peace and

cooperation come about, who knew how to "make every agreement a mere piece of paper"? Even without naming Karl Liebknecht, the report refers to his doings in the following words:

> It is they, and they we accuse, who day after day falsely attributed every crime to our comrades in the government. Who know no other word but "bloodhound" anymore, and themselves are wading through blood! Who allegedly are fighting for the Revolution, and want nothing but *annihilation*, *anarchy*, *terror*! For whom the Russian wasteland and its starving people is still not enough, who aspire to another wasteland: Germany! Who preach world revolution and will only achieve one thing: world decline [*Weltuntergang*]!

And the report closes with the words:

> Comrades! Here you have the report about the conduct of your representatives in the government. You must pronounce judgment over it, since it is through your trust that we are called *Volksbeauftragte*! If you choose to exonerate us, you must do one more thing!
>
> You must give us power! *There can be no government without power*! Without power, we cannot carry out your mandate, without power we are delivered over to anyone who is criminal enough to misuse his comrades and their weapons for their own pathetic ambition!
>
> Do you want the German socialist Republic? Do you want *your party comrades* to lead the government on your instructions?
>
> Do you want us to conclude *peace* for you as quickly as possible, and care for your *food supply*? Then help us to create for the government a people's might [*Volksmacht*] so that it can protect its dignity, its freedom of decision, its activity against attacks and *putsches*. 24 December has cost us monstrous amounts in the people's wealth and the people's regard. Another day like that, and we will lose the rank of a state with which one negotiates and concludes peace!
>
> A government, so said comrade Ebert to the representatives of the *Volksmarinedivision*, that cannot assert itself also has no right to exist! Help defend this right! Every man fight for this right!

In principle, the representatives of Independent Social Democracy could have signed this as well. But it was as a result of a different issue that they found the justification for deciding to put an end to the collaboration between the two social-democratic parties in the critical period of the Revolution, by force of which the sailors' uprising instigated by Dorrenbach and his colleagues succeeded in its aim.

Notes

1. [Ed. B. — Eleventh item in the folder of official documents for the Enquiry by the Prussian *Landversammlung* about the unrest in January 1919.]
2. [Ed. B. — Note the middle sentence, with our added emphasis, of this instruction signed by all the *Volksbeauftragte*. Only by [taking this into account] is a just verdict possible about the clash that its [observation] had as a result.]
3. Emil Barth, *Aus der Werkstatt der Revolution* (Berlin: A. Hoffmann's Verlag, 1919).

CHAPTER 13

The Independent Social Democrats' Departure from the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*

The *Volksbeauftragte* from Independent Social Democracy understandably saw the events of 23 and 24 December with different eyes than their colleagues from the ranks of the Majority socialists. Emil Barth, as we have seen, had been with his sympathies on the side of Dorrenbach. Dittmann and Haase had not gone through the critical events of 23 and 24 December, but instead heard Barth's very subjectively-coloured report about them without being immediately able to confirm its correctness in all respects. So they declared the order given to the War Minister during the night of 23 December by Ebert in agreement with Landsberg and Scheidemann for the purpose of rescuing Wels to be a step that could not be justified by the state of affairs at the time. When the matter came to be discussed on 27 December in a joint session of the *Volksbeauftragte* and the Central Council, people's spirits collided with one another fairly ferociously. Barth held a punctilious accusatory speech against the three Majority socialists, whom he charged with premeditated planning for the bloody confrontation and systematic deception of their colleagues, as he outlines in his own work. Haase and Dittmann would presumably have been less inclined to cast a similarly harsh verdict if they had not precisely in those days had gotten into an intense factual antagonism about questions of German Eastern policy [*Ostpolitik*] and the dissolution of the *Heer* with Ebert and his comrades. The latter wanted to preserve a body of troops in Germany that, should the situation arise, would be strong enough to protect the Germans in the Eastern provinces and the Baltics

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against Poland on the one hand and the Bolshevists on the other by armed force, and on the other hand, they were prepared to make various concessions to the *Oberste Heeresleitung* [Supreme Army Leadership] regarding the scope and timescale of carrying out the resolutions of the Council Conference about abolishing insignia of rank, etc. By contrast, the Independent *Volksbeauftragte* flatly rejected the idea of contemplating even the possibility of any warlike action whatsoever, and in particular condemned the idea of undertaking any such action against Soviet Russia, and insisted on strict implementation of the resolutions of the Council Congress concerning military questions. At the end of the session, they formulated their standpoint in the following eight questions, which they handed over to the Central Council to be answered:

1. Does the Central Council condone the fact that, during the night from 23 to 24 December, the cabinet members Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg gave the War Minister the in no way circumscribed order to proceed against the *Volksmarinedivision* in the *Schloss* and *Marstall* with military force?
2. Does the Central Council condone the ultimatum given on the morning of 24 December by the troops of general commander Lequis with only a 10-minute deadline, as well as the artillery bombardment of *Schloss* and *Marstall*?
3. Does the Central Council declare itself in favour of the immediate, strict implementation of the resolutions passed by the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils about the abolition of rank insignia and the ban on carrying weapons off duty for officers in the *Heimatheer* [Home *Heer*]?
4. Does the Central Council condone the fact that the *Oberste Heeresleitung* states in a confidential telegram to *Heer* Group *Ober-Ost* that it does not recognise these resolutions by the workers' and soldiers' councils?
5. Does the Central Council condone the relocation of the Reich government from Berlin to Weimar or another place in central Germany, as advocated by cabinet members Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg?
6. Does the Central Council condone the fact that instead of the complete demobilisation of the standing *Heer* only a reduction of the same will take place down to peacetime levels, including retaining and eventually backfilling the two classes of 1897 and '98?

7. Does the Central Council stand alongside us on the standpoint that the government of the socialist Republic cannot and may not defend itself militarily with the general mass and remainder of the old standing *Heer*, founded on blind obedience, but only with a *Volkswehr* [People's Defence Force] to be formed from volunteers according to democratic fundamental principles?
8. Is the Central Council in favour of embarking immediately on the socialisation of the industries that are ready for it through legislative acts?

After a three-hour-long consultation, the Central Council gave its answer, to which it for its own part added two questions to the Independent *Volksbeauftragte*. These were their answers to the questions from the Independents:

1. The *Volksbeauftragte* merely gave the instruction to do whatever was necessary to free comrade Wels. But that only happened once the three *Volksbeauftragte* were informed by the leader of the *Volksmarinedivision* that he could no longer vouch for the life of comrade Wels. This the Central Council condones.
2. The Central Council answers the second question with: No.
3. The Central Council takes the standpoint that the resolutions passed at the Congress are to be carried out. The *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* is instructed to present the provisions for their implementation as soon as possible.
4. The fourth question is answered with No.

To questions 5, 6, and 7: The Central Council cannot answer these questions without detailed prior discussions with the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*.

8. The Central Council wishes to hear a presentation from the Commission introduced to prepare for socialisation about the status of its works extremely soon. It is of the view that the Socialisation Commission, in carrying out the resolutions of the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, will make positive proposals about the socialisation of enterprises ready for it (in particular mining) as soon as possible.

The questions posed to the Independents were:

Are the *Volksbeauftragte* prepared to protect public peace and security, especially private and public property, against violent infringements?

Are they also prepared, with the means at their disposal, to safeguard their own capacity to work and that of its organs against acts of violence, regardless from which side they should come?

After a short time, the joint session was reopened, and Hugo Haase gave the following statement on behalf of himself, Barth, and Dittmann:

> We are resigning from the government, and justify this step in the following way:
>
> 1. The bloodbath of 24 December is due to the fact that *Volksbeauftragte* Ebert, Scheidemann, Landsberg gave the War Minister an unrestricted instruction to secure order through military violence. Such an instruction was neither necessary nor expedient to free city commander Wels. Wels' life was endangered in the highest way possible precisely by a barrage onto the building in which he was located. Further, the military assault took place only 7 hours after the War Minister was assigned this task, so at a time when, if Wels' life was truly threatened, it was hardly still possible to count on his being unharmed.
>
>   *Volksbeauftragte* Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg took not a single step during all this time to supervise the execution of their order, which was tantamount to a blanket authorisation.
>
>   We cannot take responsibility for the fact that authority over the life of our fellow humans is transferred to the discretion of a representative of the old system based on violence. The route of negotiations, which ultimately led to achieving the goal, should have been allowed to be abandoned at any stage of the events.
>
>   In contrast to this our view, the Central Council has condoned the conduct of Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg on this question.
> 2. How dangerous the instruction given to the War Minister was already emerges from the fact that the Central Council had to expressly disapprove of the way in which the instruction was carried out even in answering question 2.
> 3. The answer to question 3 likewise does not satisfy us, since it does not demand the immediate and strict implementation of the resolutions passed by the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, but rather simply contains a call for prompt presentation of provisions for their implementation.
> 4. Our questions 5, 6, and 7 are of decisive importance for the conduct of domestic and foreign policy in the spirit of the Revolution. Since the Central Council defers its answer to these fundamental questions despite the detailed consideration they have been given in this consultation, we

are convinced that the achievements of the Revolution are hereby endangered as well.

5. The answer to the question about the immediate socialisation of the industries ready for it, demanded by the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, in no way ensures that the Congress's intentions will be realised.
6. Since we are hereby retiring from the government, we no longer have to answer the questions posed to us as *Volksbeauftragte*.

Anybody who examines these paragraphs closely will hardly find the so very weighty step of leaving the government to be sufficiently justified. In point 1, it is left completely out of consideration that Ebert and his colleagues found themselves in a dire predicament that night, and that they could not assume that the War Minister would act as counterproductively as did his subordinate, General Lequis. In fact, as Barth himself recounts, when Dittmann confronted Herr von Scheüch the next day in conversation with the ludicrousness of firing at a house with cannons in order to free a man inside it, he had answered animatedly that he had *neither received nor given* such a preposterous order. If he had received one like that, he would have roundly refused it because of its foolishness and inappropriateness. This was a reprehensibly nonsensical interpretation of the order, and this the Central Council had straightforwardly excoriated. Paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 insinuate that the answer to the questions touched on there could not bear a single minute's delay, which was surely not the case, and the reason given under 6 for why the questioners did not have to answer the questions posed them by the Central Council can only be regarded as sheepish elusiveness.

The *Volksbeauftragte* from Independent Social Democracy gave more compelling reasons for their party's departure from the government in a statement published by *Freiheit* on 29 December 1918. There it is explained that the differences of opinion within the government had increasingly widened on important questions of domestic and foreign policy. The credulity of the Majority socialists towards the *Oberste Heeresleitung* had led them to adopting their proposals almost without hesitation, whereby the power of the old military forces was strengthened anew. The hesitation of the Majority socialists in the face of various impertinent demands by the *Oberste Heeresleitung* regarding border protection in the West, retention and deployment of two cohorts during demobilisation, intransigence in matters of abolishing rank insignia and ban on carrying weapons off duty had had the effect that they "had become ever more

audacious in their approach, and were whipping up all the officers against the resolutions of the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, which the government had approved, and thereby against the government as well".

They then refer to the events of 24 December and explain that "the Central Council, to which the Independents at the Congress had delegated no representatives", had covered for Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg in its answer to the questions they had presented to it, even though they were to blame for the terrible cannonade against the *Schloss* and *Marstall*, as well as the bloodshed, through their instruction to the War Minister. With that, "the political moment had come in which the Independents had to resign from the government". It continues:

> Shortly beforehand, the Independents stood before the question of whether they wanted to take over government alone. They would only have been in the position of doing so if they could have relied on a Central Council that shared its perspectives in all substantial political questions. For every government lacks the basis for existence if the force from which it itself derives its power, which can recall it at any time, thinks differently in its fundamental perspectives than it does itself. The further development of domestic and foreign policy will surely multiply the existing difficulties for the new government. If it allows itself to be seduced into continuing to play the role of the strongman, which it has started to do so unhappily, then this will lead to fighting within the people with unforeseeable consequences.

Fundamentally, there was much truth in this. The question is only whether anything whatsoever about the situation was improved by the Independents leaving the government. In it, they could at least prevent much of what they considered damaging, since they faced each other 3 against 3, and had agreed that a voting tie in a motion or a proposal would mean its rejection, and in the introduction to their statement they themselves emphasise that despite the great differences in the fundamental perspectives between them and the Majority socialists, a collegial collaboration had existed. "All those involved", it says there, "endeavoured to fulfil their allotted task and avoid all personal frictions for this purpose. They also succeeded in keeping their collaboration free from the embittering moment of personal reproaches." To this, it could also have been remarked that, if there were great differences of opinion between the two groups, then also no less great consensus with regard to the positive tasks of the Republic. It is noticeable that in this latter respect, the statement does not

raise any serious complaints, and indeed in the six weeks of cooperation a sizeable piece of foundational reform work was achieved. No, the true reason for this impossibility of remaining in the government for the three Independents lay elsewhere. It lay in the fact that any support for such collaboration, which cannot proceed without mutual concessions, had been lost to them within their own party. The party was physically—i.e., as regards its following among the people—too weak to take over the reins of government itself, and it was morally too weak to exercise the self-denial that participating in government imposes on every party, which is especially required in a revolutionary situation. The three Independent *Volksbeauftragte* lacked cover by no means only from party comrades in the Central Council, but, which was far more important—since the Central Council consisted of socialists who in no way merely trailed behind the three Majority socialists in the government—they also lacked understanding within their own party about the true situation outside in the country, and the political necessities that these gave rise to. But ultimately, and this was perhaps the decisive factor, even though Haase and his comrades presumably did not admit this to themselves: the clash with the sailors following Dorrenbach was only the prelude to a confrontation with Karl Liebknecht and his growing following, which was becoming ever more clearly apparent. One could have different opinions about the possibility of avoiding the former. But that a violent confrontation would one day become unavoidable with Karl Liebknecht and his allies, who worked according to the Bolshevist pattern and probably also with Bolshevist support, nobody who followed their doings with open eyes could delude themselves. To have to stand in such a situation on the side of the governing force that would then have to exert the necessary repression, that was a perspective that could also fill others with dread as well.

But it was unmistakable at the same time that the resignation of Haase and his comrades from the government extraordinarily increased the danger of this. It worsened the situation of the young Republic at home and abroad. Towards foreign countries it robbed the government of that element that, because of its stance during the war, could offer it the greatest guarantee for a complete break with the traditions of the *Kaiserreich*. Domestically, it deprived it of its safeguard against the suspicion of those radically-minded circles among the people [*Volkskreise*] that in other circumstances would also have been ready to defend it against every assault from the left. On a human level, the blow that the three Independents dealt the Republic through their departure from the government can be

understood and at least excused. Politically, it meant an undignified and destructive capitulation before *Spartakus*.

* * *

In the days at the turn of the year 1918/1919, the German *Spartakus* League held a conference in Berlin, in which it constituted itself as the Communist Party of Germany by adopting a political programme that was aligned to the Bolshevist doctrine. This meeting, which was attended by 114 participants, among them 83 delegates, resolved after very lively discussion not to take part in the imminent elections to the *Nationalversammlung* by 62 votes to 23, but rather to use the election campaign for a fierce agitation against the vote and against parliamentarism. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg belonged to those who had favoured participating in the election. But despite their emphatic speeches, they remained, as one sees, in a decidedly weak minority, and one must say that the opponents of participating in the election, to which the previous Reichstag deputy Otto Rühle also belonged, had the stronger logic on their side. To call on workers to vote for a chamber that one rejects in every respect would have been the most severe contradiction. Rosa Luxemburg was more logical when in a speech about the political theory of the new party she explained that for its justification one would have to recourse to the *Communist Manifesto*. For in the *Manifesto*, the break of its authors with the doctrine of Blanquism was only partially completed.

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CHAPTER 14

The Communist Uprising in Berlin, January 1919

The Unity Cabinet of the Majority Socialists and Its Programme

After the Independent social democrats had resigned from the government, the Central Council appointed the Majority socialists Paul Löbe, Gustav Noske, and Rudolf Wissell, all three of whom came from the working class, as *Volksbeauftragte*.

Paul *Löbe*, originally typesetter and then editor, was still little-known in the non-socialist world outside his place of activity in Breslau, but enjoyed great esteem in Breslau because of his businesslike decisiveness coupled with an urbane demeanour, in non-socialist circles as well. He declined, arguing that he did not feel himself equal to a position in the government, and believed that he was more needed in his home province. Of calm judgment, even temperament, and a winning nature, he would in many respects have been a useful counterpart to the second of the newly-chosen *Volksbeauftragte*.

He, Gustav *Noske*, originally woodworker and later community representative, author, and Reichstag deputy, had already made himself known in his public activity through a mixture of sober judgment, opposition to rhetoric, and inclination towards a military way of thinking, and had already attracted fierce attacks from the side of the radical wing of Social Democracy long before the war through statements in this vein, which he was not exactly in the habit of responding to gently. In Kiel, he had proven himself a good organiser and proactive leader of masses after his election

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as governor, and had learned how to make people overlook some of the gruffness in his demeanour, which he had as a born Brandenburger, through persuasive justification of his measures in the troops' council. But in this he still lacked the self-control that is a necessary requisite of a leader in critical situations.

Rudolf *Wissell*, originally a mechanical engineer and then trade union leader and workers' secretary, had already brought to light in this activity and as a party man the intellectual talent and the capacity for rapidly getting to grips with problems he was presented with that he would later deploy as a parliamentarian and minister. The model example in our time of a proletarian who relished education, he is not free of a proclivity towards brooding and doctrinaire rigidity.

Since no replacement was picked for Löbe, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* from then on remained limited to five members. With the new distribution of areas of work, Ebert was allocated the Interior, Landsberg Finances, Noske *Heer* and *Marine*, Scheidemann Foreign Affairs, and Wissell Social Policy.

The Central Council advertised the change of government in an appeal to the "workers, soldiers, and male and female citizens of the German socialist republic", which began with the words:

> In this most difficult hour, we turn to you. The *Volksbeauftragte* appointed by the Independent Social-Democratic Party have left the government. The continuation and safeguarding of the new Revolution lies from now on solely in the hands of the old Social-Democratic Party.

However one might stand towards the political question of the present day, it continues, only one thing could matter now, the creation of a government capable of carrying out its work, which had to bring the German people above all freedom and bread, secure the achievements of the Revolution, and maintain the unity of the German people. The Central Council would commit all its strength to accomplishing the tasks associated with that. But the precondition for this was:

> unconditional maintenance of public peace and security, the prevention of violent infringements in private and public property, the resumption of regulated production, which is endangered in the most serious way by the prevention of coal deliveries.

In the Ruhr territory, strikes were namely already breaking out, in which agents of the Bolshevists had their hand, and likewise these worked to organise strikes and uprisings in the Saxon-Thuringian lignite district, and other parts of Germany. As was realised later, the Bolshevist government of Russia used millions at the time for the purpose of putting Germany in a situation of internal disintegration that should make possible the proclamation of a council republic after their example.

A special appeal by the Central Council to the soldiers is held along the same lines as the one to the population in general. The following should be cited from it:

> Soldiers, you must help us! We know only the voluntary obedience of free men. Whoever cannot serve our cause out of conviction may go. But anyone who stays a soldier must know that the new Reich government is the highest authority of the German Republic, and that every man who bears arms owes it his loyalty as the highest commanding force. This government wants nothing but the freedom and welfare of the people. You shall help protect these! If you are determined to protect the free order of the Republic on all sides, nobody will dare to touch it. So be true to the great cause of the German People's Republic! … If we do not keep order, we must starve! Save the achievements of the Revolution through your self-intentioned discipline, and save our people from its looming downfall.

The same spirit suffuses an appeal with which the new government notified the German people of its reconfiguration. It reads there:

> The crippling division has been overcome. A new, unified Reich government has been formed. It knows only one law of action: above all partisanship the well-being, the existence, and the indivisibility of the German Republic! Two members of the Social-Democratic Party have taken the place of the three departing Independents, after the unanimous resolution of the Central Council: Noske and Wissell. All members of the cabinet are equal. Its chairmen are Ebert and Scheidemann.
>
> And now to work! Internally, we must: prepare for the *Nationalversammlung* and ensure its undisturbed meeting, to seriously take care of food, to take in hand socialisation in the spirit of the Councils' Congress, to seize war profits in their most extreme form, to create work, to support the unemployed, to expand the provisions for the bereaved, to foster the *Volkswehr* with all means, and to enforce the disarmament of those without authorisation; outwardly, we must: bring about peace as quickly and favourably as possible, and staff the delegations of the German Republic abroad with new men, filled with the new spirit.

In broad strokes, that is the programme of the *Volksbeauftragte* until the convocation of the *Nationalversammlung*. How they fulfilled this in the various areas of substantive government affairs should be described in connection with an overview of the entire work of the Revolution in the period of the *Volksbeauftragte*. In this chapter, it is in the first instance only a matter of recounting the fighting in Berlin up to the eve of the elections for the *Nationalversammlung*.

The departure of the three members of Independent Social Democracy from the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* had the immediate result that with three exceptions the Secretaries of State, Undersecretaries, and Assistants who belonged to this party also relinquished their offices. The exceptions were Ed. Bernstein (Reich Treasury), Karl Kautsky (Foreign Office), and Emanuel Wurm (Reich Food Office). The named men had likewise placed their offices at the disposal of the new government, but at its suggestion, Kautsky remained in post for a few more weeks because of his archival work, Wurm because a suitable replacement was not immediately available, and Eduard Bernstein administered his until the end of February 1919. He had, to give an example for the reunification he was convinced was necessary between the two social-democratic parties, joined Majority Social Democracy shortly beforehand, without leaving Independent Social Democracy. When later a resolution by the latter party made dual membership impossible, he decided on affiliation to Majority Social Democracy with the justification that the maxims of its domestic policy seemed to him to be the only ones that were right for the young Republic.

In the first days of January 1919, the members of the Prussian government who belonged to Independent Social Democracy also vacated their offices—Dr. Graf Arco, Dr. Breitscheid, Ad. Hofer, Adolf Hoffmann, Paul Hoffmann, Dr. Kurt Rosenfeld, Hugo Simon, and Heinrich Ströbel. They justified this by declaring their solidarity with Haase and his colleagues immediately after their resignation from the Reich government, and with reference to the fact that an argument that they were having at the time with the Central Council had convinced them that it was impossible for them to work with it. The reproach made in this justification against the Central Council, that it was taking a "point of view hostile to the Revolution", and was delaying decisions about its most important questions, was declared as counter to the facts in a semi-official notice in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*.

Yet even on the day before they gave up their offices in the government, the Independents Adolf Hoffmann, Kurt Rosenfeld, and Heinrich Ströbel had signed the following *directive against excessive wage demands by the workers*, together with their Majority socialist colleagues Otto Braun, Paul Hirsch, and Eugen Ernst:

> The wage movement among the workers has in recent times taken on a development in its way and scope that must awaken the direst fears and bring wide areas of goods production to a standstill. The lamentable but inevitable consequence can only be unemployment, hunger, and misery. State enterprises are subject to the same economic conditions in this respect as private ones. Neither mining and the railways nor all other remaining state enterprises can tolerate for long that their expenditures exceed their revenues. But this danger has already set in to a dangerous degree. It therefore becomes the imperative duty of the state government to firmly oppose the growth of wage expenditures beyond the level of what can be tolerated. The expert ministers are hence requested to examine wage demands with which they are approached not only with every appreciation for the current needs of the working class, but also carefully as to whether by approving them burdens are not imposed on the businesses in question that they cannot bear without going under, and which thereby endanger the entire financial management of the state. In such a case, the demands are to be rejected.
>
> Berlin, 2 January 1919.
>
> The Prussian government:
>
> Hirsch. Ströbel. Braun. Ernst. Adolf Hofmann. Rosenfeld.

But with the resignation of the Independents from the government, their stance on this question changed as well. Instead of strengthening internal solidity in the Republic, it had the effect of damaging the government's influence. It was this above all that made the resignation of Haase and his colleagues from the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* into a fateful blow to the young Republic. From a collaborator in its construction, Independent Social Democracy soon and for a long time became more or less a helper of those who pursued the opposite. To be sure, the leaders of Independent Social Democracy who had somewhat calmer judgment initially tried to adopt a kind of intermediate position, and acted accordingly in a confrontation that took place only a few days after the change of government, and which initiated one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of the Revolution. This was the uprising of the Communists in the second week of January 1919.

The Eichhorn Affair and the Start of the Uprising

The sole member of Independent Social Democracy who had not followed the example of Haase and his colleagues, was their party comrade Emil Eichhorn, to whom had fallen the task during the November days of taking over the leadership of the Berlin police headquarters, and was confirmed by the Executive Council. Although he is by nature certainly no violent man, and has little provocative about himself in his demeanour, Eichhorn had already repeatedly ended up in conflict with representatives of the central government, and was regarded with great mistrust in the ranks of Majority Social Democracy as a pace-setter of the extreme wing of the Berlin Opposition, which was working towards a violent proclamation of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. It was known that since summer 1918 he had led a section of the Telegraph Agency called "*Rosta*" for short, which in Berlin acted as the intelligence service of the Bolshevists and was fed with Bolshevist means. It had been discovered that the *Sicherheitspolizei* [security police force] that was subordinate to him was led in part by representatives of the so-called Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and he had been blamed for this security police having abrogated its service during the sailors' uprising at Christmas 1918, in favour of the insurrectionary sailors. It was also claimed that in the morning of 24 December 1918, Eichhorn had equipped 1500 workers from the Schwarzkopf machine factory with weapons for the purpose of supporting the sailors. The latter is resolutely denied by Eichhorn in his work, published by the *Freiheit*-Verlag under the title *Eichhorn on the Events of January*, but at the time it was believed—just as in general in such agitated times the battling parties are in the habit of being quite extraordinarily credulous as regards the actions of partisans of the opposing side. What is surely clear, however, is that Eichhorn was a thoroughly loose cannon [*unsicherer Kantonist*] as far as the government was concerned. His conception of the tasks of the Revolution was, as his work shows, fundamentally different from that of the government. While the latter wanted to consolidate what had been politically achieved by making efforts to steer further economic-social development into calmer waters, he belonged to those who sought to keep the masses in motion in order to make the dictatorship of the revolutionary workers a reality, which in Germany was only to be realised by driving civil war to its peak. Eichhorn himself relates that on 28 December 1918, in a gathering of Independent Social Democracy, he had emphatically demanded the "junction with the left

[*Anschluss nach links*]"—i.e., with the Communists—and described it as *questionable* whether the *Nationalversammlung* would even convene.[1] From another side, it was noted that in various gatherings he had mocked the political change that had been completed as "Revolution in carpet slippers".

Now the office of chief of police in the capital city is far too important a post for a government to be able to leave it during a revolutionary time in the hands of a personality that cleaves to a party which is working towards the violent overthrow of this government. We know how things went in the French Revolution with the Hebertists, when they seriously took up a position against Robespierre's central government. In the press of the Majority socialists, Eichhorn's remaining in office was declared an impossibility, and on 2 January 1919 the socialist Minister of the Interior for Prussia, Paul Hirsch, had him summoned to a session in the Ministry the next day, in which two members of the Central Council of the Workers' Councils also took part, and in which the described allegations about his behaviour were raised, alongside others—among them also accusations about irregularities in office. Things proceeded very heatedly, Eichhorn made it clear that he did not acknowledge the Ministry as an authority superordinated to him, and in response to a question from the Central Council member Heller about how he stood towards the question of the *Nationalversammlung*, he retorted—again, according to his own account—that he declined to answer this, since he did not feel he was obliged to account for his political perspective to the Ministry.

That was naturally an answer too, and one that made his remaining in office indeed impossible. For the office of police chief in the capital is no purely administrative position, but rather at the same time an office that is political to a high degree. Hence, in all major states, it is also subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior. So if the latter, after the discussion had revealed afresh the deep contradiction between their viewpoints, passed the resolution with the assent of the Central Council that Eichhorn could not remain in his position, then there was fundamentally nothing to be objected to in this. Here, it was not a matter of reprimanding an official, but about resolving a relationship that had become untenable between the leadership of two important offices, especially since the faction of Liebknecht and his colleagues, which Eichhorn favoured, was preaching civil war ever more barefacedly. It is another question whether the way in which the resolution was translated into practice was politically correct.

According to Eichhorn's account, when the discussions of 2 January were broken off, in response to him saying that he would give an answer to the attacks that had been made on him in writing, he was told by Minister Hirsch that if the answer arrived by midday on 4 January, it would still be taken into account. But before his answer could be sent off, he already received his letter of dismissal. But in that there was at least no formal transgression. Since it emerges from the following chapter of Eichhorn's work that he only received this letter *once the afternoon had come round* on 4 January, so when the time limit had already expired by several hours. But this hurry can be explained by the sharp intensification of oppositions and the prevailing mistrust towards Eichhorn. Yet the text of the letter could surely have been formulated differently. It namely read:

> Ministry of the Interior. Berlin N.W.7, 4 January 1919.
> IIb. 46. Unter den Linden 72/73.
>
> We hereby dismiss you as of today on delivery of this directive from the commissary administration of the police headquarters of Berlin. Herr Minister Ernst has declared himself ready until further notice to take over the leadership of this headquarters besides his previous functions, and will enter into this service *immediately from today.*
>
> signed: Hirsch.

Since it was to be expected that this act of dismissal would put the elements standing behind Eichhorn into considerable agitation, for reasons of smartness already a less injurious form would have been appropriate. By prefacing it with a short reference to the impossibility of the continuation of the given state of affairs, and the resolution of the Central Council that expressed this, the Ministry would not have lost any face, and averted the verdict on this dismissal as a pure act of force. We know how much every measure that appears in such a light goads agitated spirits into intransigence. Indeed, this letter was also used immediately to light the fuse.

Only a few hours after his reception, Eichhorn headed to the party bureau of the Independent Social Democracy of Berlin, which lay on Schicklerstraße, where its central executive committee as well as the so-called Revolutionary Shop Stewards of Berlin, who had probably been summoned together because of this matter, were holding sessions at the same time, and delivered the news of what had happened to both bodies. He insists that in doing so he painstakingly refrained from taking any

stance towards the question of what should happen now, but rather left these to the uninfluenced decision of the party and the Shop Stewards. However, in a situation like that, the mere telling, where it is as subjectively coloured as Eichhorn gives it in his work, works without an express call to protest more strongly in this sense than with one. Unanimously, the Shop Stewards, and with only a few dissenting voices the Berlin Central Committee of the party, resolved to call up the part of the Berlin workers they had access to protest demonstrations. They further informed the leadership of the Communist party of this resolution, and agreed the following appeal, which was straightaway prepared for distribution in fliers, and appeared in the morning of Sunday 5 January in *Freiheit* and *Rote Fahne*:

> Attention! Workers! Party comrades!
>
> The Ebert-Scheidemann government has raised its anti-revolutionary activity to a new *perfidious assault* against the revolutionary workers of Greater Berlin: it insidiously tried *to force Chief of Police Eichhorn out of office*. It wants to put its compliant tool, the current Prussian Police Minister Ernst, in Eichhorn's place.
>
> The Ebert-Scheidemann thereby want not only to remove the last representative of the revolutionary Berlin workers, but above all in Berlin to *erect a violent regime against the revolutionary workers*.
>
> Workers! Party comrades! Herein it is not about Eichhorn's person, you yourselves should rather be deprived of the last remainder of your revolutionary achievements through a general *coup*.
>
> The Ebert-government with its accomplices in the Prussian Ministry wants to support its power with the help of the *bayonet*, and *secure* itself the *favour of the capitalist bourgeoisie*, the disguised representatives of whose interests they were from the beginning.
>
> The blow that is being dealt to the Berlin police headquarters shall strike the whole German proletariat, the whole German Revolution.
>
> Workers! Party comrades! *You cannot, you must not tolerate this*! Out therefore to mighty *mass demonstrations*. Show your rulers your power; show them that the revolutionary spirit of the November days has not gone out in you.
>
> Gather today on Sunday at 2 o'clock for an imposing mass protest in the Siegesallee!
>
> *March en masse*! Your freedom, your future, the fate of the Revolution is at stake! Down with the violent rule of Ebert-Scheidemann-Hirsch and Ernst!—Long live revolutionary international socialism.

Berlin, 5 January 1919.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards and representatives of the major enterprises of Greater Berlin.

The Central Committee of the social-democratic voter associations of Greater Berlin for the Independent Social-Democratic Party.

The Centre of the Communist Party of Germany (*Spartakus* League).

Nothing that was suited to gripping the worker's soul could have been put together more skilfully than happened in this appeal. The worker's disposition instinctively revolts against a reprimand, which is how Eichhorn's dismissal was represented here, so that it appeared in the light of a brutal act of violence. So it was not difficult to prompt great masses of the Berlin workers to stream together in the Siegesallee, particularly since in *Rote Fahne*, *Freiheit*, and *Republik*, Eichhorn's dismissal and the events associated with it were presented tendentiously, and apart from that the communists had pursued an agitation for immediate demobilisation among the soldiers of the younger cohorts. There and then, the mass was riled up by Liebknecht and others in hate-filled speeches against the socialist government, to which the most shameful motives were imputed, and from trucks weapons were distributed to a greater number of people, most of them young lads. Then a great procession was formed which drew through the main streets of the city to Alexanderplatz, and strengthened by newcomers *en route*, filled up the whole wide surroundings of the police headquarters.

There, in the meantime, Eugen Ernst, who had been named chief of police by the government, and the just-appointed city commander Anton Fischer, had appeared accompanied by some soldiers and called on Eichhorn to hand over his office in the tone of an old comrade-in-arms. Eichhorn refused with the justification that he did not owe his office to the government, but rather to the revolutionary Berlin proletariat, represented in the Berlin Executive Council. They were to communicate to him the grounds for his dismissal *in writing*, and first give him the opportunity to defend his conduct in office before the Executive Council and the Central Council. Ernst's attempts to move him to relent by means of friendly persuasion remained just as fruitless as Fischer's announcement that in case of need violence would be brought to use. Eichhorn, behind whom stood his loyal security troops, persevered doggedly with his argument that he would not give way from his spot without that precondition, the room filled with soldiers and agitated demonstrators, so that nothing

remained for Ernst and Fischer but to beat a retreat. But instead, while the sailors were thronging below, Liebknecht, Ledebour, Däumig, Dorrenbach, Pieck, and other spokesmen of the radical movement then came into the police headquarters, and again held addresses to the crowd from its balcony, along with Eichhorn himself. They informed them of what had happened and of Eichhorn's conditions with the appropriate colouring, adding that, if the government was not to accept these conditions, Eichhorn would make his remaining in office dependent on a resolution by the Executive Council, and if necessary enforce this against the will of the government by force.

Very understandably, these addresses had the effect of provoking the mass, which was already roused anyway, into even more lively exclamations against the Ebert-Scheidemann government, so that, as Ledebour stated on 20 May 1919 in the sedition proceedings initiated against him, the reception of their addresses convinced him and his friends "that the masses were urging action, that their patience was exhausted".[2] They conferred about whether they should strike out, and a number of those who took part in the discussion, which dragged on for several hours, urgently called for this. About this, Ledebour writes:

> To justify this, facts were disclosed to us by credible persons. These claimed that *apart from the working class the Berlin garrison too was uniformly on our side*. Not only the *Volksmarinedivision*, but pretty well entire regiments were ready to take up arms at the side of the Berlin workers to overthrow the Ebert-Scheidemann government. From another side, however, this was criticised as a somewhat too optimistic perception. We then also received the news that in Spandau great masses stood ready for us, to rush to help us in case of need with 2000 machine guns and 20 guns. We received similar news from Frankfurt an der Oder. All of that together had the effect of ultimately bringing about the resolution, for which I too voted, that *we could not put up with the government's attempt to remove Eichhorn from his position*, all the less so, since the revolutionary working class would absolutely not understand such acquiescence, and would then lose trust in its revolutionary organisations.[3]

After those who were gathered there had come to unanimous agreement to resist Eichhorn's removal, and to make an attempt to topple the Ebert-Scheidemann government, they relocated from the police headquarters to the *Marstall*, which belonged to the commandant's office, in which in the meantime all manner of merrily oppositional elements had

settled in comfortably, and there, it continues in Ledebour, "a *provisional revolutionary committee* was appointed by the representatives of the revolutionary workers, consisting of a great number of persons who were entrusted with the leadership of the revolutionary movement, and who conceivably would have to provisionally take over the functions of government and administration if this should become necessary. The committee should remain in operation until such a time as, in turn, a provisionally elected workers' and soldiers' council would install a government."

As chairmen of this committee, which was composed of 33 members, Georg Ledebour, Karl Liebknecht, and the member of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards Paul Scholze were elected with equal rights. When in the first light of day the city commandant Anton Fischer came to the *Marstall*, he found out from the sailors who were on guard what sort of guests had gathered there, without, however, the sailors knowing precisely what was actually going on. After the compromise settlement of 24 December, they had promised not to take part in any action directed against the government, and the majority of them also showed themselves determined to keep their word; but apart from Dorrenbach, who admitted to Fischer that there was a secret agreement between him and Liebknecht, and a few others, they were clearly unsure how they should behave towards Liebknecht and his comrades. Only once, later in the day, they worked out what these people were really up to, did the majority declare itself to be against the undertaking, but shied away from defending the government's cause with armed force, but rather wanted to observe "neutrality". All the same, around evening on 6 January, they obliged the uninvited guests to clear the *Marstall*, which Liebknecht and the other leaders had already left as a somewhat suspect place.

Up to this point, Fischer had been held in penal custody. They had treated him politely, but had tried to move him to take back in writing the alarm order he had given a few days beforehand, and to lay down his office as commandant, though he determinedly refused to do this in the form presented to him. On being informed by Liebknecht that the government was to be overthrown the next day, and that they had already come to unanimous agreement about a new government, he tried to dissuade him from what he intended to do by pointing out that the greater part of the working class was not on his side, but received the answer: "That does not matter at all, the more enterprising and intelligent part is certainly on my side." And when Fischer then remonstrated with him that his undertaking would only have bloodshed as a result, he received a similar answer as

Eisner did from Liebknecht six weeks beforehand: "Here sentiments do not decide, but facts, and the facts are in our favour."

With a similar overestimation of the significance of the following it had attained, the revolutionary committee had already drawn up the appeal with which it intended to make known the advent of its rule the following day. On the morning of 6 January, this was presented by a sailor, who had been tasked with occupying the War Ministry at the head of 300 armed comrades, to Undersecretary Hamburger, who was in office there, without a signature, along with the demand to hand over the building, failing which an assault would take place against it. Hamburger held a brief consultation with his colleagues, and then stated that he could not possibly follow an instruction that lacked any signature, and that the sailor should first furnish one as proof. And the sailor correctly went back to the *Marstall* and fetched the signatures, whereby Karl Liebknecht signed for Ledebour, who had driven back to his home. It read as follows:

> Comrades! Workers!
>
> The Ebert-Scheidemann government has made itself impossible. It is declared deposed by the undersigned Revolutionary Committee, the representative of the revolutionary socialist workers and soldiers (Independent Social-Democratic Party and Communist Party).
>
> The undersigned Revolutionary Committee has temporarily taken over the affairs of government.
>
> Comrades! Workers!
>
> Come align yourselves with the activities of the Revolutionary Committee.
>
> Berlin, 6 January 1919.
>
> The Revolutionary Committee
>
> p. p. Ledebour. Liebknecht. Scholze.

So, according to this, Liebknecht, Ledebour, and their colleagues took it upon themselves, supported by fanatical parts of the workers of Berlin, to depose a government that had only just had its mandate confirmed by the representatives of the overwhelming majority of Germany's workers. That was not a revolution, but the attempt at an act of violence that, as far as necessary, it was not only the right but also the duty of the government to crush with violence. For its success in Berlin would have placed Germany into a state of cataclysmic anarchy. The majority of the German people would never have submitted to a dictate from Berlin that came about in such circumstances. That Liebknecht and his comrades did not

tell themselves this indicates above all their political obsessiveness and myopia.

However, subduing them was not a simple task. At that moment, the government lacked the means of military power so much in Berlin that if the conspirators, as one may call them, had, in the night of 5 to 6 January with the armed men who were at their disposal, undertaken to occupy the Reich Chancellery, they would not have met with any serious resistance. On the afternoon of 5 January, since the Reich Chancellery was besieged by demonstrators, the members of the government had already preferred to convene in the private home of a sympathetic colleague instead. There, around evening, they found out that the *Vorwärts* building and other newspaper buildings had been occupied by armed Spartacists. "We sat with one another in a depressed mood", Noske writes.[4] Going to a pub for dinner was viewed as infeasible, since one had to presume that that would lead to unwelcome scenes. So they accepted the invitation of a friendly businessman, Georg Sklarz, whom Noske had met in the street, and spent the evening and the greater part of the night at his home. A leaflet is drawn up that calls on the workers who are loyal to the government to report for duty and protect the Republic, which is copied in a private printer's, and it is ensured that it is successfully redistributed before the gates of the factories. This also did not fail to have its effect. From all corners of the city, on the morning of 6 January, hordes of workers streamed into Wilhelmstraße before the Reich Chancellery, which was soon covered by a crowd numbering many thousand, while the conspirators had summoned their support at 11 o'clock in the morning to take up positions in the Siegesallee. This happened with the following appeal:

> Workers! Soldiers! Comrades!
>
> With dazzling vehemence you have proclaimed your will on Sunday, that the last malevolent stroke of the bloodstained Ebert-government was dashed.
>
> Now greater things are at stake! We must put a stop to all counterrevolutionary machinations!
>
> Therefore out of the factories! Appear *en masse* today at 11 o'clock in the morning in the Siegesallee!
>
> We have to consolidate and carry through the Revolution! To battle for socialism! To battle for the power of the revolutionary proletariat!
>
> Down with the Ebert-Scheidemann government!
>
> Berlin, 6 January 1919.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards and representatives of the major enterprises of Greater Berlin.

The Central Committee of the social-democratic voters' associations of Greater Berlin of Independent Social Democracy.

The Centre of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartakus League).

As already mentioned above in passing, on the evening of 5 January, armed troops of communists, as the *Spartakus* people now called themselves, with those who were particularly well-organised and pugnacious, called the Red Guard, at their head, had occupied the rooms of *Vorwärts*, as well as the buildings of the publishing companies Büxenstein, Mosse, Scherl, and Ullstein. While the press of the nationalist-reactionary parties for the most part remained unmolested, the great liberal and democratic daily papers of Berlin, who were on the side of the Republic—*Morgenpost*, *Tageblatt*, *Volkszeitung*, *Vossische Zeitung*—were prevented from appearing, and *Vorwärts* once again disrobed of its character as the organ of the Majority Social Democrats, to be transformed into an organ of the Spartacists. An eighty-man-strong police security troop under Eichhorn's command, which had to guard the building and the rooms of *Vorwärts*, had let themselves be disarmed without resistance by around 300 *Spartakus* people, whereupon these made themselves at home in the rooms. They prevented the editorial staff from entering, specifically from filling their places of work, and part of the technical staff was compelled to produce an issue of *Vorwärts* as "organ of the revolutionary working class of Greater Berlin", with an appeal printed at the top that justified the renewed seizure of the property with arguments that in their hamfistedness exceeded even the language of the red edition of 24 December 1918 in its suspicion of the government and the *Vorwärts* editorial staff. At the end, the intended dismissal of Eichhorn is mentioned, and then it reads:

But this perfidious clan, including the bourgeoisie that feared for its property, had thoroughly miscalculated.

You, workers, demonstrated on Sunday in tremendous masses against the planned shameful act, and prevented this *putsch* through your resolute demeanour.

You did not want to leave your work incomplete, you marched *en bloc* to *Vorwärts*, knowing well that this "government organ" would call for new *putsch* attempts, would once again pour out its flood of lies.

> *But now you have conquered* Vorwärts *for the second time. Now hold fast to it, fight for it tooth and nail.* Do not let it be wrested from you, make it into the organ it should be: *a standard-bearer on the way to freedom.*

Ledebour in his statements before the Berlin High Court, Eichhorn in his already-cited work, and other leading participants in the attempted overthrow of the government claim that this occupation of the newspapers came about without any incitement on the part of the organisations involved and even without their knowledge. According to Ledebour, "the masses" had thereby "impulsively followed their sentiments".[5] But things like this do not happen from out of nowhere, and it was also not a matter of an action by the "masses", but rather an undertaking by troops equipped with weapons. Already the simple fact that the troops occupied the various newspapers *at the same time* indicates that they or at least their leaders *had followed a very specific plan*, which does not necessarily need to have happened on the basis of resolutions or even with the advance knowledge of the well-known organisations or committees. There were also elements at work who worked alongside them, if not behind their backs. It has already been pointed out that agents of the Bolshevists had their hand in all these actions. A not insubstantial percentage of the occupiers of the newspapers and quite especially of *Vorwärts* were Russians, and the appeal published in the latter, of which a section is reproduced above, betrays a very literarily adroit pen. They should really stop feeding the world revolutionary fairytales. Great parts of the workers of Berlin had been sufficiently poisoned and adequately talked into delusions about what the Revolution in Germany was and could be, to provide willing manpower for all possible acts of violence, which were described to them as necessary for securing the Revolution. But spontaneous acts of the masses look different to those newspaper occupations, whose purpose after all was none other than to kill the expression of uncomfortable criticism. Also, at least a part of the leading personalities of the groups of which the Revolutionary Committee was composed were for merely opportunistic considerations opponents of the suppression of the bourgeois-democratic and Majority socialist press.

But a different spirit than in the Centre of the Berlin organisation of Independent Social Democracy reigned in the Reich Central Leadership of this party. When the executive and a part of those Reichstag members of the party who were present in Berlin came together on the morning of 6 January 1919 in the party's offices, they took an extremely dim view of what had happened during the night, and of the appeal by the

"Revolutionary Committee", and immediately entered into a debate about what they could do to prevent bloody confrontations. It was the last executive session of Independent Social Democracy that the author of this work attended, and I must point out that it is incorrect when Ernst Heilmann writes in his pamphlet *The Noske Guard*, which vividly describes the circumstances in which Noske's volunteer army corps emerged: "When the January *putsch* was about to fail, these same Independents suddenly issued the slogan for unification [*Einigungsparole*]." From all accounts of the struggles of those days it emerges, and even Heilmann observes, that on the morning of 6 January the government's situation was extraordinarily threatened, so that it had extreme need to keep itself passably defended against the assaults of the *Spartakus* people. But in the aforementioned session of the party leadership of Independent Social Democracy, this author's comment that the best thing that could happen for our part in this moment was to attempt a mediation and for this purpose to approach the highest authorities on both sides, met with approval without further ado. Rudolf Breitscheid, W. Dittmann, K. Kautsky, and Luise Zietz—Hugo Haase was travelling—were designated as the suitable personalities for taking this task in hand, and also dedicated themselves to it with great fervour and skill, supported by Oskar Cohn, who arrived sometime later. It was not their fault if success eluded them over the course of several days of continuous efforts.

The appeal by the "Revolutionary Committee", which called out the revolutionarily-minded workers of Berlin to flock together in the Siegesallee on the morning of 6 January, had all the more success since the individual newspapers read by the workers, which appeared that morning, *Freiheit*, *Rote Fahne*, and *Republik*, explained matters in overall agreement, albeit in various tones, in such as way as if the Revolution was truly threatened by the Ebert-Scheidemann government. From early on, the broad Siegesallee was already filled densely from one end to the other with people, and even in its entrances people were crowding, most of the workers, shoulder to shoulder. Yet among those who came there was a significant percentage of the merely curious, although of the others quite a few had weapons with them, and one could see a great number of red flags waving. Now here, now there, more-or-less improvised speeches were held, full of abusive exclamations against the government, and mostly ended in ringing shouts of Up! Up! Up with Liebknecht, Eichhorn, etc., and Down! Down! Down! with Ebert-Scheidemann, eerily like a military drill. Up to now, everything went according to plan.

Only one thing was missing: the word from the Revolutionary Committee indicating what should actually happen now. It had summoned the masses "to consolidate and carry through the Revolution", as it said in its appeal, but it could not agree what measures it should counsel them to take for this purpose. The idea of proclaiming a general strike against the government had already become obsolete because the executive of the Majority socialists, who stood by the government, had called out the workers to a political strike on its behalf, and the factories stood empty. Seizing control of the War Ministry without serious fighting had become a forlorn hope, after the sailors' leader who had been dispatched to carry out the plan had, in his *naïveté*, left the military stationed in the Ministry the time to take the necessary steps for their defence. Likewise, it was now impossible to undertake an attempt at occupying the Reich Chancellery without serious fighting, whose outcome was, on top of everything, highly doubtful. Opinions were divided as to whether they should let it come to such fighting, and so they deliberated back and forth while the masses waited in the Siegesallee, without reaching a definite decision. With the exaggerations that are unavoidable with it, but in the heart of the matter not without justification, *Rote Fahne* wrote, on the anniversary of these events, against Ledebour, who had boasted about his part in them, polemically with bloody derision:

> And then the unheard-of happened. The masses stood there in cold and fog from early on, at 9 o'clock. And somewhere their leaders sat and deliberated. The fog lifted, and the masses kept standing. But the leaders deliberated. Midday came, and with it cold and hunger. And still the leaders deliberated. The masses were feverish with excitement: they wanted an action, even only a word, that would soothe their excitement. But nobody knew which one. Because the leaders were deliberating. The fog fell again, and with it twilight. Sadly the masses went home: they had wanted great things, and done nothing. For the leaders were deliberating. They had deliberated in the *Marstall*. The they went back to the police headquarters and deliberated some more. Outside, the proletarians stood on the empty Alexanderplatz, rifles in their hands, with light and heavy machine guns. And inside the leaders deliberated. In the headquarters the guns were readied; sailors stood in every corner of the passageways, in the front room there was a bustle of activity, soldiers, sailors, proletarians. And inside the leaders sat and deliberated. They sat for the whole evening, and they sat for the whole night and deliberated, they sat the next morning when day was dawn-

> ing, some still, some again, and deliberated. And again the hordes came into the Siegesallee, and still the leaders sat and deliberated.
>
> No! These masses were not ready to take power, otherwise they would by their own decision have placed men at their head, and the first revolutionary act would have been to make the leaders in the police headquarters stop deliberating.

Certainly, these masses were "not ready to take power". The great majority of them did not even know for what purpose they had even all been called together. But those who did have an idea of this had been told that in Spandau and in other places in the surrounding area thousands of soldiers were only waiting to join forces with them, and that proved to be baseless chatter. Not only did those soldiers fail to materialise, not only had the troops of the *Marinedivision* stationed in the *Marstall* resolved, under the influence of the city commandant Fischer, not to take part in the uprising, but rather to remain "neutral", but even those regiments quartered in the barracks of Berlin held back. Though they were off limits as troops to help the government, the majority of them were also not prepared to back the uprising. Meanwhile, of the armed Spartacists, a part still sat fast in the occupied newspaper businesses, and the rest was perhaps enough to occupy a few more buildings, but was not numerous enough to subjugate Berlin with its great mass of workers who were hostile to *Spartakus*. So not only the intellectual but also the material preconditions were missing that were essential if the uprising was to become a revolution. And since, apart from that, in the Revolutionary Committee itself, once the rush of the first night had passed, differences of opinion set in about how far they should pursue the attack, they could naturally offer no victorious slogan to the masses awaiting them in the Siegesallee. An inglorious situation, but one into which the Berlin Opposition would put itself again on another occasion.

What the Government Looked Like: Gustav Noske as Military Commander-in-Chief

To be sure, in the morning of 6 January 1919, things did not look very much more edifying than in the camp of the Revolutionary Committee in the council of the government, which had already convened early. It could count for its security neither on the soldiers camped in the barracks nor the *Marinedivision*, and not even the Republican *Soldatenwehr* that was in

the process of being created promised passing reliability, not to speak at all of those of Eichhorn's police troops, who had been influenced against the government. The worker masses that had taken up positions from the factories for its protection, as they formed a wall with their bodies and filled the entire surroundings of the government building, shoulder to shoulder, provided an uplifting and for the moment even encouraging spectacle, but would still not have been in the position of offering longer resistance against a revolutionary troops equipped with guns, whose mustering did not lie outside the realm of possibility. For the suppression of the uprising, they were reliant on regiments who lay outside the city, and until these arrived, they had to give way to "*Spartakus*", whose people had then also immediately occupied a further number of important buildings—the Railway Directorate, the Provisions Office, parts of the Reich Printing Office, the Army Engineers' barracks, and the Silesian Railway Station. Also over the course of Monday shootings already broke out between *Spartakus* people and those government supporters who had access to weapons.

For better or for worse, the government saw that, if it did not want to leave the capital city in the hands of the *Spartakus* people, who were capable of any and all violent acts, for an incalculable amount of time, it was placed in the position of needing to bring in regular troops, and with them also to make use of their officers. But the troops needed a commander-in-chief with far-reaching authorisation, and *Oberst* Reinhardt, who had been named War Minister in the meantime—not to be confused with the *Oberst* Reinhardt who played such a despicable part in the Kapp *putsch*—suggested Lieutenant-General von Hoffmann for the role. But it was rightly objected that a general would be regarded with mistrust by the workers, and so, recalling the military circumspection and energy shown by Gustav Noske in Kiel and the neighbouring *Marine* places, he was posed the question whether he did not want to take over the matter himself. As he writes himself, he answered that on the spur of the moment: "As you wish! Someone has to be the bloodhound, I shall not shirk the responsibility!"[6] Unfortunately, matters stood in such a way that in fact nobody who took over the task of the military defence of the Republic would have been spared that epithet by those who had urged towards this bloody confrontation. On all sides, they recognised that by taking over this post, Noske had made a sacrifice, and the appointment, which was presented to him straightaway, was enthusiastically signed by the Central Council of the

Workers' Councils, whose members had taken up position in the Reich Chancellery, conscious of the gravity of the situation.

Greeted joyfully by the Majority socialist workers, who had formed a barrier outside, and calling to them "I will bring Berlin to order for you, you can depend on it", Noske, accompanied by a young captain in civilian clothing, headed to the General Staff building, which was located near the Lehrter Railway Station, whereby at various points he had to pass the procession of partisans and hangers-on of the Opposition, who had been called to the Siegesallee. He was to discuss with some officers of the General Staff the measures that protecting the capital and liberating the offices and shops occupied by the Spartacists let seem necessary. On the way, he had seen great numbers of armed people in the procession of the Opposition masses, had come across the trucks with machine guns that waited at their disposal at the *Siegessäule*, and had become convinced by this that to save Berlin quite different quantities of troops were required than the few sure troops which the military leadership in Berlin had at its disposal at that moment in time. The officers belonging to the General Staff were of the same opinion, and they likewise agreed with Noske that an operation with the soldiers who were available to them at that moment would only mean a dangerous frittering-away of their forces, and that they should far rather only intervene militarily once they had mustered enough troops to be able to reckon with a complete success. Since they were not sufficiently secure from a serious attack from the side of the General Staff building before which the demonstrating masses were surging—with good leadership they could have captured it on that day without any difficulties—the headquarters was relocated to the suburb of Dahlem into the *Luisenstift*, and this was made ready for military purposes. Already on the next day, an activity took shape there, Noske writes, as if in an anthill. Officers moved into the offices that had been arranged for them, volunteers came in hordes to let themselves be assigned to divisions, weapons were driven up in trucks, an entire wagon park was brought in, a radio station was set up—"after three days the area resembled a military camp".[7] Troop divisions of various sizes were mustered in the villages of the surrounding area.

Whether all of that was truly necessary on that scale, one may doubt in retrospect. But the verdict about the political justification of these preparations is not to be measured by what only turned out later on, but rather how matters appeared at the moment they were happening, and there, they looked bad enough when viewed from the standpoint of the govern-

ment. Eichhorn turns things roundly on their head when he relates in his apologia [*Rechtfertigungsschrift*] that the masses who were demonstrating in favour of him and his coalition had still been "unarmed with very occasional exceptions" on the morning of 6 January, and that that "only changed once the right-socialists began to arm themselves with the help of the government".[8] The exact opposite was the case. Faced with the fact that the Spartacists and their following were plentifully equipped with weapons, the Majority socialist workers who had gathered before the Reich Chancellery called on the government to give them weapons, and then received them with the assent of Scheidemann. Around noon, he held a speech to them, and when the shouts rang out back at him from among their ranks "Arms! Arms! Give us arms!", he answered: "Alright then, we will kit you out, and not just with walking-sticks!"

But in these matters, one should be able to tell the truth against oneself. Certainly, at the time, the Revolutionary Committee displayed phenomenal "revolutionary dilettantism", as Eichhorn calls it. But that popular elements, who were influenced day after day by revolutionary slogans, and who they then summoned up with fiery words to overthrow a government, since this had now become necessary, would furnish themselves with weapons wherever possible—about that even the authors of the appeal could not be unclear. Its language could not be interpreted in any way whatsoever other than that the going was about to get tough. And that Noske, after what he had seen unfolding before him, now took those measures that seemed the most suitable to him to crushing the uprising by force if this became necessary, he cannot be reproached for in any way. The responsibility for this lies with those who had played in so unscrupulous a way with the fire of unrest. Solely in terms of the dictates of the moment, they were only its logical consequence.

But these measures had an import that could not yet be fully overseen in the heat of the moment, but which has become extraordinarily fateful for the further development of the Republic.

In his work, cited earlier, Noske speaks of the fact that he was reproached for having put the troops under the command of their old officers at the time, and defends himself against this by observing that a great part of the junior officers who led the troops had demanded officers of him, since they "only saw a protection from unnecessary losses in experienced leaders". That may be so, and it is further thoroughly to be believed that the officers who willingly placed themselves at Noske's disposal at the time did so without particular ulterior political motives, but truly only intended to

fulfil a duty towards their country. But the effect was that ultimately bringing in these officers was the first act in the drama that would mean the renewal of the political influence of the military caste in Germany. Until then, the upper echelons of the military, under the pressure of the great defeat they had suffered and the antimilitarist mood of the broad majority of the people, which had been mightily fostered by it and by the sufferings of war, had restricted themselves to carrying out purely military-technical functions, as were made necessary by the task of a regulated dissolution of the returning reserve troops and the preparations for the new organisation of the Wehrmacht that was to be expected, and the like. But now they began to play the part of the saviours of society, and to adopt ever more self-confident language. If in that they temporarily found a certain cover behind Noske, then still the main blame does not lie on him, but rather on those who systematically worked towards not allowing the German Republic to continue its peaceful development as a democratic community, with great expenditure of money: the Bolshevist movement in Russia, and its agents in Germany.

In how far the Moscow government had a leading hand in that uprising cannot be established with certainty. What is beyond dispute is that Karl Radek, who held counsel with it, was in Berlin during those days. He claims that he dismissed the uprising as a failure without much hesitation, and then also subjected it to very disparaging criticism. But with that, the question of his intellectual co-responsibility for it is self-evidently not answered in any way whatsoever.

Attempts at Mediation and Their Failure

While Noske took the measures that would be required if it became necessary to suppress the uprising by force, negotiations carried on in Berlin to resolve it through mediation.

On the afternoon of Monday 6 January, Breitscheid, Dittmann, and Kautsky appeared in the Reich Chancellery, introduced by Max Cohen-Reuß, the chairman of the Central Council, where they were received by the members of the government and six members of the Central Council, and submitted to them the offer by the Central Committee of Independent Social Democracy

> to bring about negotiations to avoid hostilities, and the installation of a commission to arbitrate the points of difference at hand.

Both the cabinet members who were present—Ebert, Scheidemann, Landsberg, and Wissell—as well as the members of the Central Council said that they were fundamentally prepared to accept this mediation. The Central Executive of the Independent Social Democrats of Greater Berlin, to whom Oskar Cohn and Luise Zietz had delivered the offer, passed a similar resolution late that afternoon. In the evening, further, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards resolved in a session, at which the Independent socialists and the *Spartakus* League were represented, by 63 votes to 10 likewise to accept their mediation. Six representatives each of the Independents and the Revolutionary Action Committee were selected, who entered into negotiations at 12 o'clock at night in the Reich Chancellery with the five members of the government and the five mediators. At the suggestion of Dittmann, who held the chair, to negotiate immediately about a cessation of hostilities for the sake of avoiding further bloodshed, they drew up the following four demands for an "armistice":

> 1. Cessation of hostilities by both sides. 2. No further bringing-up of troops by either side. 3. Removal of the troops already brought in by both sides. 4. No further bringing-in of weapons and munitions by either side.

The four government members declared that they could not agree to this, but rather issued the following statement after thorough reflection:

> For us it is a matter of conscience to use violence only to ward off violence. We continue to take this point of view. We will make no use of weapons for any attack. We can only consent to any kind of *arrangement after* the *buildings* occupied in the evening of 5 January and over the course of 6 January 1919 have been freed.

Various accounts, among them also W. Dittmann in his witness statement in the Ledebour Trial, emphasised that the government members had taken a far brusquer stance in the discussion in the evening of 6 January than in the afternoon in the first attempt by the mediation commission, and this changed stance was taken as evidence that in the intervening time messages must have reached them from military circles that put them at ease regarding their own safety, and primed them against the insurgents. However, Scheidemann vociferously denied this before the Investigative Commission of the *Landesversammlung*, and explained the difference in his and his colleagues' stance between afternoon and night

with the fact that in the first meeting, where Dittmann and his colleagues came alone, "they had had to do with sensible people who really wanted to mediate", but that in the night session the representatives of the Revolutionary Committee who had come with them had struck a tone and held out the prospect of demands that were insulting to the highest degree, and which compelled him and his colleagues to emphatically declare that would only be able to enter negotiations at all under very particular preconditions, and that the minimum precondition for them was the release of the newspapers. This is also confirmed by the statement by the member of the Central Council, Robert Leinert, and has the greater likelihood in its favour. The only thing that the mediators achieved in that discussion, which dragged on for a very long time, was that both parties said they were prepared to call on their supporters not to use weapons for an attack. At 3 o'clock at night they parted ways, and deferred the continuation of the preliminary discussion until next morning at 11 o'clock.

This did not lead to any more favourable result. The representatives of the Revolutionary Committee resolutely refused to free the occupied newspaper before the start of negotiations, and found support for that among the Independents of Berlin. That would mean, they explained, giving up their position of power in advance, so that the government could dictate their conditions, it would be nothing other than a capitulation. The freeing of the newspapers would only be "the result of the negotiations".

In other words, the representatives of the revolutionary committees asserted their standpoint of power vis-à-vis the government. The latter should consent to the insurgents negotiating with it as if from one power to another power, which fundamentally would have amounted to recognising the occupation of the newspapers and public buildings as a legitimate measure of any random organised opposition group. One can grasp that the government members could not let themselves in for that. Yet they would not have lost any face, but rather let everyone recognise their intellectual superiority if they had demanded a frank explanation from the representatives of the parties of the Revolutionary Committee as to what, in their opinion, should actually be the object of these factual negotiations. The duty to lay one's cards on the table is often already a compulsion to concede the impossibility of one's intended purposes. To publicise before all the world that they wanted to depose the Ebert-Scheidemann government, and replace it with a government composed of Spartacists, Independents, and a minority of carefully screened

Majority socialists—as, according to Leinert's statement, members of the Committee had suggested in private conversations to members of the Central Council—would have meant the leaders of the uprising compromising themselves in a way better than any the government could ever have wished for. It would immediately have earned it the active succour of a great part of the troops garrisoned in Berlin who now believed they had to behave "neutrally", and lent their demand to vacate the newspapers the greatest moral force. But since the government members had failed to expressly confirm to them what they had already learned from the proclamation delivered by the emissary of the Revolutionary Committee in the War Ministry, as well as from the remarks of individual Committee members, they encouraged the perception that it was not very weighty considerations for the entire internal development of the Republic that dictated their demand, but rather more formalistic-bureaucratic considerations. Their declaration that above all the freedom of the press had to be secured before one could have any discussions made more of an impression on bourgeois circles, which did not even need any convincing at all, than on those circles among the working class whom it was necessary to persuade of the government's right to make the demand it had imposed.

But since the government neither wished nor was able to give up its demand, while the insurrectionists wanted to use this release of the newspapers as a bargaining chip, the efforts of the mediation commission necessarily had to fail. In the session of 7 January, Karl Kautsky proposed that the government and the Central Council declare from the outset that they "regard the negotiations as having failed if they do not lead to the complete restoration of press freedom." That was rejected for the aforementioned reasons, and likewise a declaration by the insurrectionists' representatives was deemed insufficient, which had the following wording:

> We regard the newspapers, which have come into the hands of the revolutionary workers over the course of the fighting, only as an instrument of power to carry out this fighting. The upshot of this is that a *conciliation* that satisfied both parties *would include the surrender of the occupied newspapers.*

The representatives of the Independents and the Action Committee thereupon declared that through the demand for an immediate release of *Vorwärts* and the other newspapers, which had not yet been made the day before, a new situation had been brought about, for which the authorisations they had been given were not enough, and hence an adjournment

had become necessary. The continuation of the discussion was accordingly postponed until 10 o'clock in the morning of 8 January.

During the discussion, the news had arrived that between 11 and 12 o'clock, the Railway Directorate building, which had been occupied by rebels the afternoon before, had been stormed by government troops, and the insurrectionists' representatives declared that to be a breach of the affirmation given the evening before that the governments' troops would not take up arms for an attack. Yet this reconquest had been carried out by a small troop of army engineers without any influence from the government, while conversely early in the morning on the same day armed rebels had prevented the production of *Vorwärts* in the Linden Printery, located near the Schiffbauerdamm, by use of force, and had thrown the copies that had already been produced into the river. Eichhorn, who in his book stays silent about this and other incidents, writes in connection to the report by *Freiheit* about the negotiations that this report showed

> indisputably the duplicitous game that the Ebert-Scheidemann government and its Central Council was playing with the workers' trust; on the side of the workers and their mediators there was the will for an understanding, accommodation in the extreme, but on the other side hypocrisy and sly betrayal! Government and Central Council *wanted no understanding*, they wanted to smash the revolutionary strength of the workers with their mercenaries, and choke the will to complete the Revolution in a bloodbath. But for that they had to deceive the workers and stall for time until enough government troops had arrived for them to venture to do their bloody work without danger.

To start with, what is misleading here is a juxtaposition that runs throughout the entirety of Eichhorn's work: here the government with its following, and there *the* workers, whereas in fact the representatives of the revolutionaries were in no way only workers, but counted among them canny politicians like Ledebour, while the government was the agent of by far the greater part of the socialist working class in Germany, and, as it soon turned out, represented the greater mass of the workers in Berlin as well. Furthermore, this alleged "accommodation in the extreme" consisted in an insistence to the extreme on the desire to keep occupied the buildings—which were occupied illegally and allegedly also against the wishes of the movement's leaders, and which had not fallen into the Spartacists' hands "over the course of the fighting", as it says above, but through a raid that

met with no resistance—as instruments to exert pressure for some extravagant demands or other. The occupation of the Railway Directorate, with which lay the regulation and control of the entire railway traffic, had happened at a point in time where the attempt at mediation was already underway, and could have no other purpose than to prevent the government from being supported by troops from outside as far as possible. The complaint about the reconquest of the building was evidence of how little the government was dealing with harmless, peace-seeking people. Even if the government itself and the Central Council, which was overwhelmingly composed of workers, had deliberately pursued a policy of stalling towards the rebels at that moment, they would have been within their rights in doing so, since they were to be forced by means of compulsion to make political concessions that they were convinced would heavily damage the general state of the country. But the motives of their behaviour were different. As Max Cohen, one of the chairmen of the Central Council, later testified before the Investigative Commission of the *Landesversammlung*, the negotiations were

> according to the impression of all their participants, something like empty chatter. They always turned on one and the same thing; both parties cleaved to their conditions, and repeated their reasons again and again.

The negotiators of Independent Social Democracy had been visibly yearning to move the Revolutionary Shop Stewards towards sensible concessions, but did not manage to accomplish this. Hence, there was nothing left for the members of the government and the Central Council but to insist on their fundamental standpoint, and appeal to the healthy good sense of the mass of the socialist workers of Berlin, albeit not without at the same time taking care to raise military forces that could reconquer what had been violently and illegally seized by the Spartacists by force if need be.

In this, the following should also be taken into consideration. We were on the eve of the elections to the *Nationalversammlung*, against which the workers had been riled up by the communists in assemblies, in the *Rote Fahne*, and in a flier with all the means of an unscrupulous dialectic. In the flier, which had been distributed in the first days of January, the election day had been presented in enormous letters as “the day of the bourgeoisie”, it said “this surrender of the power of the German people to the bourgeoisie, that is what the elections for the *Nationalversammlung* are”.

The *Nationalversammlung* would "not care for the cripples, nor for the orphans, but ensure that the great 'war profiteers [*Kriegsgewinnler*]' get the interest for their war loans regularly paid out". Hence "away with the *Nationalversammlung*!"—that had to "ring out in the streets and in the factories". And in a different part of the appeal:

> That is why our struggle against the *Nationalversammlung* must consist neither in passive voting, in simple abstention, *nor in mere disruption of the elections*, nor in the mere attempt at dispersing the *Nationalversammlung*; what matters in this struggle is to conquer positions of power.

But it is obvious that to the extent that the workers of the capital let themselves be captured by this dialectic, the effect of this could only be that in the election, the workers' votes were weakened relative to the votes for reactionary parties in the country. So the occupation of *Vorwärts* was more than just the securing of a temporary position of power, it was at the same time the *suppression of the votes of the party* whose *organ Vorwärts* was. On top of that, one of the wings of the building in which *Vorwärts* was produced housed the rooms of the executive of the Social-Democratic Party along with its working materials, registers, and records, whose capture meant crippling the party's work to the highest degree. Hence the stubborn insistence of Liebknecht's followers on holding onto the *Vorwärts* building until the very end, but hence also the government members' insistence on the release of the newspapers, including *Vorwärts*, as the precondition of any substantive negotiations. Otherwise objectively-judging critics of the behaviour of the Ebert-Scheidemann government at the time have entirely overlooked this important aspect of the question.

But the embitterment of the people from the Revolutionary Committee about the government's rigid stance with respect to giving up the newspaper buildings, etc., also had its explanation in the fact that with every day, their prospects became less favourable to them, and in wide circles of the workers the number of those defending their course of action melted away. Through a tendentiously one-sided depiction of what had occurred, and through surprise attack manoeuvres, they had been able to score day-long successes, but they could not achieve lasting domination over the general public.

Already on 6 January, as we have seen, the great majority of the members of the *Volksmarinedivision* had turned their backs on the revolutionary preachers [*Revolutionsdiktierer*]. Dorrenbach, who since Monday

noon had disappeared from the *Marstall*, was declared relieved of command by the division's troop leaders, and in his place an opponent of his politics by name of Mastelertz was elected as commander, with the sailors' leader Grundtke as his adjutant. Grundtke, in conjunction with his comrades Bruska, Fullbrandt, Haller, Halses, and Schirmer, had freed the *Marstall* during the afternoon of all persons who had no business being there. In vain, then, did Ledebour seek to win back the division for the movement of the Revolutionary Committee. The Committee had to relocate its sessions from the *Marstall* back into the police headquarters.

In the evening of 6 January, the then-director of Parvus's Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften and Majority socialist Albert Baumeister, along with some forty people he had gathered, occupied the Reichstag building, which the Revolutionary Committee had failed to take into consideration, and from there the Brandenburg Gate. He had repeatedly solicited the government members to issue him a permit to procure weapons, but after he had finally argued with them for over an hour, he had been formally denied with the explanation that issuing weapons meant fighting and bloodshed, and they did not want to be responsible for that.[9] So he and some likeminded fellows, among them the *Vorwärts* editor Erich Kuttner, who had been convinced by what they had seen in the city that matters would not be resolved without fighting, took matters into their own hands. Even during the night, they obtained the trucks necessary for bringing in weapons, and made preparations for forming a troop of reliable like-minded comrades. Already the next day, they managed to appreciably increase their number, and, partly by use of cunning, also got hold of sufficient weapons. Further, an ambulance for the wounded was equipped under the command of a doctor who was a party comrade, which also soon had plenty to do, for in the surroundings of the Reichstag there were all manner of clashes with patrolling rebels, who inspected passers-by who seemed suspicious to them for weapons, and, where they found them, sought to forcibly deprive them of them. In the following days, the number of those who voluntarily reported for duty to defend the Republic grew so strongly that ultimately, after Baumeister and his comrades had received the necessary authorisation from the government after all, three regiments of a Republican *Schutzwehr* [Defence Force] composed almost solely of social democrats could be formed, the first of which received the name "Reichstag", while the second was named "Regiment Liebe" after Baumeister's fellow soldier, and a third after *Oberst* Grantoff, whom War Minister Reinhardt had seconded to the *Schutzwehr* as a military expert.

Of the troops garrisoned in Berlin, the regiment of the *Garde*-Fusiliers, called "Maybugs", under its commander, Lieutenant Schulze, who had been elected by the troops themselves, remained loyally on the side of the government, but was so preoccupied with its tasks as a security service in the north of Berlin, where its barracks lies, that in the first few days it did not come into consideration for a notably larger-scale action. Still, already in the evening of 8 January, it was able to send troops into action against the occupiers of the Reich Printing Office.

On that day, the Reich government issued the following appeal:

> Fellow citizens! *Spartakus* is now fighting to seize all power. The government, which in 10 days' time wants to bring about the free decision of the people about its own fate, is to be violently overthrown. The people is not to be allowed to speak. Its voice is to be suppressed. You have seen the consequences. Where *Spartakus* rules, all personal freedom and security is removed. The press is suppressed, traffic is brought to a standstill. Parts of Berlin are the sites of bloody battles. Others are already without water and light. Provisions offices are stormed, the feeding of soldiers and the civilian population is halted.
>
> The government is taking all measures necessary to shatter this rule of terror and prevent its return once and for all. Decisive actions will not be much longer in coming. But thorough work must be done, and that needs preparation.
>
> Have patience for only a little more time! Be confident, as we are too, and take your place resolutely alongside those who will bring you freedom and order.
>
> Violence can only be fought with violence. The organised force of the people will put an end to oppression and anarchy. Individual successes of the enemies of freedom, which are puffed up by them in a ludicrous way, are only of transitory significance. The hour of reckoning draws near.
>
> Berlin, 8 January 1919.
>
> The Reich government.
>
> Ebert. Scheidemann. Landsberg. Noske. Wissell.

Over the course of the day, there was serious fighting in various places throughout the city. At the Brandenburg Gate, where the rebels made spasmodic efforts to take it over, there was periodic heavy firing, and there were dead and wounded on both sides. Similarly at the Anhalt Railway Station, when the rebels made an attempt to occupy it. In the first instance, however, here too their striving was unsuccessful, and with the exception

of the Silesian Station, which was occupied on 9 January, all the stations in Berlin remained free.

On the other side, at 10 o'clock in the morning of 8 January, the mediators had resumed their work again, and until 3 o'clock in the afternoon they negotiated with the revolutionaries alone, who ultimately agreed to the following statement:

> The mediation commission of the Independent workers resolve to effect the release of the bourgeois press immediately, sofar as the government and the Central Council declare themselves prepared to enter without delay into negotiations about the remaining questions, including *Vorwärts*, after this resolution has been carried out.

Government *and* Central Council found this concession to be insufficient for them to depart from their standpoint that all the newspapers had to be freed, including *Vorwärts*, before they could enter into substantive negotiations. Viewed purely materially, it was also of limited significance, for it was not the bourgeois newspapers, but *Vorwärts* that was the object of struggle that it came down to for the revolutionaries. So, given the strong mutual mistrust, the members of the government and the Central Council could easily come to the view that the offer was only a tactical manoeuvre by which they were to be misled into acknowledging the occupation and retention of *Vorwärts* as justified, and to purchase its release through fateful material concessions, as the case might be.

Yet another interpretation was also possible. The more farsighted among the revolutionaries could not be under any illusions that it was no longer possible to think of a victory over the government, that every day would improve its position, and worsen that of their revolutionary enterprise. Already entire divisions of the *Sicherheitswehr* in the police headquarters had abandoned Eichhorn, and among a great part of those who had stayed behind fickleness had set in. In accordance with an appeal by the government distributed among the *Sicherheitswehr*, those who had defected to it reported for duty to the Majority socialist chief constable of Charlottenburg, Wilhelm Richter, and were put by him under the command of the previous division leader of the security police, Dreger, who himself again received his order from the Berlin command headquarters. But at their head, thanks to an unsuccessful manoeuvre by *Feldwebel* Spiro, was now an enemy of the insurrectionists, in the person of the previous commandant of Potsdam, Klawunde. On 6 January, Spiro had used the

detention of Anton Fischer in the *Marstall* to quickly summon a conference of the soldiers' councils of Berlin, and propose to them the election of a new city commandant. Instead of himself, as he had hoped, the choice fell, as a result of the energetic intervention of the soldiers' council of the *Garde*-Fusiliers (the "Maybugs"), on Klawunde, who had not taken a particularly harsh stance, but who certainly wanted nothing to do with this uprising. Likewise, the army engineers' barracks, which had been stormed in the evening of 6 January, had been reconquered by its original garrison, which similarly was decidedly hostile towards this new revolution. In light of these facts, the primary motivation of the members of the Revolutionary Committee, even if they perhaps did not admit it to one another themselves, could very well have been that of opening the door to a tolerable retreat. So at least Dittmann, Eichhorn, and Ledebour interpret the meaning of their statement, and if particularly the latter two like to violate the facts by whitewashing them, then in this case much speaks in favour of their interpretation being more realistic than the one outlined earlier. And here the question immediately suggests itself of whether they are not also right that a different answer than that given by the government and the Central Council would in fact have brought about a retreat and so avoided the bloodshed, and what other answer was even possible at all.

One thing even the most determined enemy of the government must concede: it could not possibly admit that the handover of *Vorwärts* be postponed indefinitely. But that is what it would have meant if, as the committee desired, this had been made dependent on reaching a consensus about the substantive, i.e., *political* questions. Setting a definite deadline for the handover of *Vorwärts* was the least that had to be demanded, and in fact the circumstances mentioned above made it imperative to set a short time limit. But on the government side, they surely could—and had to—have agreed on such a limit at a pinch. No serious interest spoke against agreeing to this: the bourgeois press would be freed immediately, *Vorwärts* at the latest in three days, and in the meantime negotiations take place about the substantive questions. With that, the door to a peaceful resolution of the uprising would have been opened for those who wanted one. For continuing on was a concession for the rebels anyway as well. But why was no suggestion in this vein made by either side? It was so obvious to try this way out that the mediators would have had to resort to it, so far as there was any prospect whatsoever that this way out would have been used.

That this did not happen can be explained among other things by the fact that *Vorwärts* was occupied by fanatical followers of Karl Liebknecht, who had declared that they would *under no circumstances* give it up voluntarily, even if they had to fight for it to their last drop of blood. In the *Rote Fahne*, the mediators were derided as "soft as plums [*pflaumenweich*]", and the "truly revolutionary" workers were called upon not to let themselves be misled by them. In the issue of 7 January, it wrote with the most exorbitant exaggeration in which this paper liked to indulge:

> 700,000 proletarians, keen for action, brimming over with revolutionary energy, are erring around the streets of Berlin, directionless, and the revolutionary bodies—they are deliberating about a deal with Ebert-Scheidemann!

That could not be. The masses had to raise a shout of "Down with Ebert-Scheidemann!" that was so energetic, so shrill, that those leaders "would lose any inclination to negotiate".

So even if the government had relented, no surety was given that the Liebknecht people would have vacated the *Vorwärts* premises without a struggle any time soon. So this question remained the cross at which the mediation foundered.

In that meeting, Dittmann suggested that the members of the Central Council should once again negotiate with the Independents and the representatives of the revolutionary councils separately—i.e., in the absence of the government members—and this suggestion was also followed. But the Central Council did not deviate from their view that the release of *Vorwärts* had to precede the substantive negotiations, and the revolutionaries could not determine on any other commitment than the uncertain statement that an understanding about the substantive questions would have the release of *Vorwärts* as its immediate consequence. The mediators drew the conclusion from this that continuing their efforts in any way at this stage of the events was futile, and gave the following statement at 8 o'clock in the evening:

> To this end, the mediators find themselves unable to continue their work. However, they say to both parties that they are ready at any time to again resume these negotiations, since they consider it their duty to do everything to prevent this tearing-apart of the Berlin workers and to avoid bloodshed.

Still that same evening, at a late hour, the Reich Printing Office was won back for the government with the help of the *Garde*-Fusiliers. It had been occupied in the afternoon of 6 January by armed workers from the Schwarzkopf machine factory, to whom the soldiers of the *Sicherheitswehr* entrusted with guarding it had yielded it without a shot being fired. The workers had elected a young foundry engineer by name of Theodor Grant as their commandant, and since he had not been a soldier, transferred military command to a certain Reutter on his advice.

Since the Reich Printing Office held 18 million marks in printed banknotes and besides that plates to print further paper money, it could have become a far more powerful "pawn" in the hands of the rebels than the *Vorwärts* printer's. But according to Grant's statements before the Investigative Commission, Eichhorn and his comrades were more concerned to take as much money as possible out of the Printing Office, and to bring it to safety for later use for the purposes of the uprising. Quite some time passed while they searched around for suitable salvaging-places and other preparations—among them working out a plan for how they would force the secretaries [*Geheimräte*] to open up the safe. A comment by Eichhorn about the impossibility of holding the police headquarters for any significant time against a serious assault seems to have given the young, politically inexperienced Grant and his people a terrible fright, and when in the evening of the 8th, a troop of *Garde*-Fusiliers approached, which had been organised by the highly diligent Lieutenant Schulze (a Chancellery official in his civilian life), Grant and Reutter surrendered the Reich Printing Office to them without a shot being fired, just as it had been given up by the security troops. Admittedly, for all that, there had been copious shooting in the access streets.

As emerges from the statements of other participants in this unrest, who were cross-examined by the investigative committee, Grant's statements also let it be recognised that among the rebelling workers there reigned an extraordinarily large degree of perplexity about the purpose of the entire insurgency, and everywhere elements mingled among them who were only interested in taking part in as much plundering as possible.

In light of the failure of the mediation attempts by the party executive of Independent Social Democracy, an agitation now set in among the workers to compel unification in case of urgent need through pressure from the masses. In the morning of 9 January, thousands of workers from the factories of Schwarzkopf and the *Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft*

[General Electricity Company] gather for a demonstration in the Humboldthain in the north of Berlin, and resolve on a call for unity for the sake of preventing further bloodshed. A commission is chosen from members of the various socialist parties, which is to negotiate in this vein with the government and the revolutionaries. Since it cannot give the former any definite commitment regarding the clearing of the buildings, it approaches the Berlin Central Executive of Independent Social Democracy, and this agrees on the following statement, which after the ringing endorsement by Oskar Cohn also find the approval of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards:

> To prevent a continuation of this fratricide, the Central Executive is ready to attempt to find a *new basis for negotiations*. It therefore proposes to let an armistice commence.
>
> It declares itself *ready*, *before entering negotiations*, to vacate the *Vorwärts* premises, if the negotiation commission of the A.E.G. and the Schwarzkopff Works receives an *assurance* from the Central Council and the government that the negotiations will be conducted in a *socialist*, *conciliatory spirit*, the points of difference will be transferred to a commission composed according to the principle of parity, and the final occupation of the police headquarters only takes place in consultation with Independent Social Democracy.
>
> Paul Brühl, 1. Chairman. Richard Herbst, Treasurer.

This declaration is described by Eichhorn as a capitulation before the government and the Central Council. But it was not taken as such by them, and a closer inspection will also show that it could still have been interpreted in very varied ways. It promised things that it was at best doubtful whether the party would be able to push through. The *Spartakus* people had not taken part in the discussions, and when in the afternoon of 10 January a delegation of workers from the Ludwig Loewe factory, consisting of members of the three tendencies, asked the *Vorwärts* occupiers whether they would be prepared to vacate *Vorwärts*, it received the answer that the occupiers would *rather let themselves be buried under the ruins of the Vorwärts building* than yield it up voluntarily. Indeed, the *Rote Fahne* had written on 9 January, after listing reports about uprisings in the provinces, and with reference to the government's call for volunteers to report for duty:

> that the government is calling up volunteers, that implies that the counter-revolution itself is no longer counting on the troops. "Volunteers" have to come forward for the bloody job of butchering the socialist proletarians. With that, the government's weakness is officially admitted, and its defeat already half-sealed.

It would perhaps be doing an injustice to someone who was murdered to speak here of the rebels' well-warranted disappointment. It lay in Karl Liebknecht's nature to see things how he wished to see them. But on his followers, his depiction of the state of affairs nonetheless had the effect of a gross deception.

With respect to the negotiations, it says in the same edition of *Rote Fahne*:

> Today it is not "parity" but rather a clenched fist that is to be directed at the Ebert-socialists. So today what matters is to elect new workers' and soldiers' councils, to staff the Executive Council afresh under the watchword: Out with the Eberts and their followers.

The government, and likewise the Central Council, had welcomed the workers' delegation and discussed the situation with them. Yet this did not seem to them of such a kind that they should let themselves in for the proposed commission, established on terms of parity. For such parity would have meant that they, who undoubtedly had the great majority of the socialist workers of Germany behind them, would have seen themselves confronted in the commission with a two-third majority consisting of *Spartakus* people and Independents, by which they could be outvoted in the most important questions. In this, additionally, it was not at all about questions of a local character, whose decision could be exclusively a matter for the workers of Berlin, but rather questions that for the most part concerned all of Germany. So both bodies declared that they could not accept submitting these questions to the proposed parity commission, and also did not consider further stalling on the question of the occupied buildings to be permissible, but that they were otherwise prepared to engage in further negotiations.

While the calls for unity from the workers multiplied, negotiations then also took place on several days. But in the meantime, however, in the first instance there was heavy fighting in the streets, and then the reconquest of the buildings was carried into effect.

Street Fighting and the Reconquest of the *Vorwärts* Building

The street fighting took place primarily in the newspaper quarter (the parts of Kochstraße, Zimmerstraße, and Schützenstraße that run into Jerusalemstraße), in the area around the police headquarters (Alexanderplatz and its side-streets), at the Brandenburg Gate and its surroundings, and in the area around the Reich Chancellery (North side of Wilhelmstraße). The fighting insurgents had plenty of machine guns and other weapons at their disposal, and had properly fortified themselves in the newspaper buildings, and also occupied many homes in the upper floors of the neighbouring area, so that they could comfortably fire down at approaching soldiers from their windows with extensive cover. What a payload their guns had was demonstrated to the writer of this work, so to speak, before his own eyes. At the time, I was still Assistant Secretary to the Reich Treasury, and was working in an office on the ground floor of what is now the Reich Finance Ministry on the Wilhelmstraße side, when during some heavy shooting that broke out in the most immediate vicinity of the building, a bullet also paid a visit to my room. It had forced its way into the corner room from the Wilhelmsplatz, flown through it, passed through the frame of the door opposite into an anteroom, likewise pierced the frame of the door that led from this into my office, flew through this at the height of about one meter above my desk and landed in the back of a volume of papers filed in a rack of shelves, where it further thoroughly satisfied its revolutionary purpose among the papers. If one could see this case from the humorous side, there were only too many others that had a far more serious character.

The fighting cost very many people's lives. Their exact number has not been ascertained, since a great number of people fought on the side of the insurgents who were not from Berlin, and hence were not claimed by anyone. It is thus to be assumed that more insurgents fell than came to the attention of the authorities. Yet the later claims by communist papers about the total number of those who fell in their opinion for the cause of the Revolution is hugely exaggerated, in reality it was certainly lower than the number of voluntary and regular soldiers who fell in battle against the uprising. Almost always in street fighting the losses among the troops are greater than among the rebels, the majority of whom fire their weapons from behind barricades or other coverings. The Reichstag regiment alone lost over 100 dead in this week of January. The Fusiliers likewise suffered heavy losses.

As late as 10 January, it looked in the government camp as if they did not consider a temporary victory for the insurgents impossible. On that day, Noske took part in the cabinet session. As he writes, he had been urged impatiently every day to move into Berlin with the available troops, but had persistently refused to do so because he considered a potential failure "to be much more intolerable than prolonging the uncertainty for a few days".[10] At the same time, he had "spoken in the strongest terms against any compromise". Now they had summoned him on 10 January to the cabinet session in Berlin. "The impatience in the Reich Chancellery", he writes, "had risen to the highest degree. They assumed that the most unfavourable development of the situation was likely if I did not come the next day with troops. No objection to this was regarded as valid. Ultimately I said I was ready to let a number of formations, among them the core troop of the Kiel Brigade, march up during the night. The orders to this effect were immediately dispatched. In the meantime, some Berlin formations and a Potsdam regiment had become ready for deployment as well."

On Saturday 11 January around noon, he then moved into Berlin at the head of over 2000 men. He did not rule out vicious street fighting. But the troop met with no resistance as it marched through Potsdamerstraße, Leipzigerstraße, Wilhelmstraße, from there to the Tiergarten, and again moved into the suburbs, but instead was mostly greeted with signs of acclaim by the public.

In the night beforehand, the *Vorwärts* building had already been stormed amid hard fighting. The house at 3 Lindenstraße, of which it formed a part, is a large so-called industrial building, which consists of five-storey houses connected by transepts, between which lie four courts that are connected to one another through large gates. From the third and fourth court one reaches the rooms of *Vorwärts*, which cost all the more casualties to capture because the insurgents had occupied other rooms apart from them in the building complex, from which they could fire down on would-be besiegers. They truly were dealing almost with a fortress, and it took experienced military types to lead the storming. This task fell to *Oberst* Reinhardt and a Major Stephani. F. Runkel describes the storming itself, which happened in the dawn hours of 11 January, in his work *The German Revolution* as follows:

> Initially, the occupied house was cordoned off with a wide perimeter, and in the dawn light three 10.5cm guns drove up, which put the building under

> fire from various sides. Hardly had the darkness faded than the heavy machine guns began to ring out. There were rat-tat-tats from every corner, and the *Spartakus* snipers even fired from the rooftops. But they could not touch the guns, which soon had a hefty say in the fighting. The grenades hit unerringly, and after about two hours, the defenders attempted to enter into negotiations. The government troops refused everything, and demanded they surrender to their mercy or otherwise. When there was no answer to this, the government troops advanced with light mortars and flamethrowers, and now came the unconditional surrender.[11]

Mistreatment and Shootings of Prisoners

The number of persons taken prisoner in the *Vorwärts* building ran to nearly 300. Against them, some of the soldiers and the public gave vent to their exasperation through gross mistreatments, which can be explained, but not excused, by the general outrage about the occupations. Worse still, there was also no shortage of shootings of prisoners. Thus, seven members of the *Vorwärts* occupiers, who had approached the besiegers to parley, the author Wolfgang Fernbach, co-worker on the *Roter Vorwärts*, which the insurrectionists had published during the occupation, a young worker-poet by the name of Werner Möller, and five unidentified prisoners, one of whom was described as Russian, were taken captive and shot in the courtyard of the Dragoon barracks on Belle-Alliance-Straße, which was located not far from the *Vorwärts* building, after some gruesome mistreatments, and in circumstances that brook no other description but brutal murder. Sadly it has not been possible to determine with certainty who the murderers were or who bears the intellectual responsibility for the murder. It was announced at the start of the storming of *Vorwärts* to the soldiers as well as the occupiers: "Whoever comes out of the *Vorwärts* building with a weapon will be shot." And only after a repeated inquiry came the answer that the prisoners that gave themselves up would be gathered up and delivered over to the state prosecutor. Major Stephani carries part of the blame insofar as he said several times to the soldiers in the barracks courtyard: "Everything that comes out of *Vorwärts* will be shot." He claims only to have announced this to calm the agitated soldiers, and the fact that he immediately intervened when soldiers wanted to shoot the captured Spartacist Frau Steinbrink, who they claimed had shot at them from the window of *Vorwärts*, and prevented her shooting, lends credibility to his assertion. But in their enraged mood, many of the soldiers inter-

preted that statement differently, and Herr Stephani ought to have known that that was a distinct possibility. Meanwhile, personalities who at the time, appealing to their having been eyewitnesses of the events, gave incriminating testimonies against him in the press, partly contradicted one another completely, and partly, like the soldier Helms before the Investigative Commission of the *Landesversammlung*, proved themselves to be so unreliable that no charge could be sustained on the basis of their evidence.

If after all that it still cannot be disputed that acts of violence that are to be condemned in the most stringent way were committed against these prisoners, which cannot be regretted enough, it is likewise not to be disputed that especially the number of those mistreated was greatly exaggerated. The majority of prisoners were marched off to the barracks under close guard with strict prescriptions regarding their conduct along the way, and were not immediately everywhere found the quarters that must be provided for every prisoner. But they were not subjected to deliberately bad accommodation. It must not be forgotten that among them there were also all manner of very dubious elements who had participated not out of political conviction but rather out of an urge to make mischief and a propensity for plundering. Even if the reports of the daily press at the time about the destruction and theft that happened in the *Vorwärts* building during the occupation were likewise greatly exaggerated, then the long list of objects removed from his living and office rooms submitted by one of the residents of the building, the merchant Ascher, alone itself already proves that quite extensive plundering did take place all the same. Among those arrested, there were besides political also common criminals, whom it was physically impossible to separate out during the transport.

And then it must be said that the political prisoners, if they were led by idealistic motivations, were not already for that reason innocent lambs. It does not excuse the murder committed against the author Wolfgang Fernbach in any way if one holds up against the statements by his friends, according to whom he never took a weapon in his hand to the last, the article from his pen that appeared in *Roter Vorwärts* on 9 January 1919, whose header "To the general strike! To arms!" alone speaks a thoroughly different language, quite apart from its content, which blames the events of 6 and 24 December in the most tendentious way on the alleged imperiousness and bloodthirst of the socialist government, proclaims its "unanimous death sentence from right and left", speaks of the revolutionary

resolve that the mass would carry out "*one way or another*, until it is kneeling on the traitors' chests", and closes with the words: "This belief in the victorious ideal of our brothers calls us *to enforce the judgment of history against their murderers.*"

One cannot say about someone who writes like that, that he opposes the use of murderous weapons.

The forceful occupation of the newspapers and the public buildings were acts of rebellion, and those who participated in them were rebels against the government installed unanimously by the Central Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. They were equipped from the very start with weapons, and, in the days when they occupied the buildings, incessantly sought to multiply their stocks of weapons and munitions. The following note was found on a man by the name of Stamm, one of the members of the *Vorwärts* occupiers who had been taken into custody, with which Stamm, according to his statement before the investigating judge, had been dispatched to the arms and munitions factory at Spandau, but had had to turn back without having accomplished what he had intended:

> The occupation of *Vorwärts* urgently pleads for a transport of L (light) and H (heavy) M-G's (machine-guns). It asks for as swift a supply as possible of all the M (machine)-guns that are at all available. M-G (machine-gun)-munition and hand grenades are likewise urgently required.
>
> Centre of the *Vorwärts* Occupation.
> Secretariat of the *Vorwärts* editorial staff.
> *Möhring. Lamprecht.*

Rebels self-evidently do not already have fewer rights because they turn their weapons on an existing government. Viewed juristically, they are criminals against the state [*Staatsverbrecher*], liable to punishment as such, but also with the right of being treated as such. And there *has not yet been a revolution* that has respected this fundamental principle more *towards its rebels*, and has *treated them more mildly after taking them prisoner*, *than the socialist German Revolution*. None of the members of its government at the time, not even Gustav Noske, can be said by any objective historiography to have behaved in a bloodthirsty or even purely vengeful way. Noske intervened militarily where he deemed it necessary in the interest of the Republic, but he never did so where provocative measures from the other side were not present, and if he did not always appraise these correctly,

then he still consistently restricted defensive countermeasures to what was necessary to quelling violent acts. One cannot charge him with anything that might be ranked even remotely alongside the bloody measures of Russia's Bolshevist government towards their rebels.

That many soldiers in their embitterment let themselves be carried away to mistreating prisoners cannot be a wonder to anyone who has more closely studied the history of popular struggles [*Volkskämpfe*]. The simple man from among the people, and that is what the mass of soldiers are, is coarse and always inclined to follow immediate impulses. Hence, e.g., in 1848 during the June Days battle in Paris, it was precisely the soldiers of the Mobile Guard, these "children of Paris", as one called them, who raged the worst against the captured June fighters, and had to be forcibly held back by their officers from even more terrible excesses against them. But the soldiers' rage is partly explained by the wild rumours that were circulating among the public about the violent acts of the insurrectionists, and which were mixed in with severe exaggerations, but in the main by their manner of fighting.

Before they got stuck into storming the *Vorwärts* building, attempts were made on 9 and 10 January to free the more accessible Mosse-Haus (the editorial staff, printery, and administration of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the democratic *Berliner Volkszeitung*, etc.) from its intruders. These had firmly barricaded the main entrance and various windows of the buildings with great rolls of printing paper, behind which machine-guns stood ready to fire, from which they directed such ferocious fire every time against the assaulting troops that these repeatedly had to call off the attack. All the same, their fighters also suffered losses, for they were shot at not only from ground level but also from the roofs of neighbouring houses and the tower of the *Jerusalemer Kirche*, which stood off to one side, and already in the evening on the 9th had to ask for a ceasefire so that they could recover their dead and wounded, which they were self-evidently also granted. In late afternoon on 10 January, they convinced themselves of the hopelessness of any further resistance, and offered a truce, which was granted to them, and which was signed off at 6:30 in the evening. During the night on 11 January, Lieutenant Bachmann, who was commanding the troops mobilised to free the Mosse-Haus—the Reichstag-Regiment—was handed a declaration signed by Ebert and Scheidemann in response to his enquiry in the Reich Chancellery, which assured the occupiers of the Mosse-Haus that their lives would be spared, and now these gave way without carrying out any more destruction than

had already been caused. Divisions of the same regiment at the same time reconquered the house of the company Ullstein. Like the occupiers of the house of the Mosse company, those of the houses Scherl and the Wolff Telegraph Bureau gave themselves up as well unconditionally after they had been given assurance for their lives. In contrast to the pompous claims of their leaders, but in accordance with the dictates of sound human reason, they preferred saving the sweet existence to which they had become accustomed to a theatrical conclusion along with senseless destruction of values.

The Reconquest of the Police Headquarters, the Collapse of the Uprising

Last of all came the police headquarters. The greater part of the security forces had, as we have seen, already left it, and Emil Eichhorn had turned his back on it for the final time on 11 January. All the same, several hundred belligerent insurrectionists still remained behind under the command of the Spartacist Braun, who had a mighty store of weapons of all kinds at their disposal. Apart from rifles, pistols, etc., belonging to the regular police troops, the headquarters namely contained in an outlying room, which had been kept secret from most people, a further large cache of weapons, which had been acquired over the course of a few weeks. The accusation of having been the creator or a least confidant of this store, whereby the suspicion of deliberate stoking of the uprising found strong support, Eichhorn rejected with the explanation that he had not had the time to occupy himself with such matters at all. By contrast, Braun's prominent participation in it remained undisputed.

In the morning of 12 January, the storming of the massive, gigantic building, which covered a large piece of land, took place. It was led primarily by Lieutenant Schulze with his "Maybugs" (Fusiliers). "It was", it says in his report provided to the Investigative Committee of the *Landesversammlung*, "a daring piece of work, especially because at our back was located the Bötzow brewery, which was an informal camp of the Spartacists, and could very easily have penetrated my troops." With great pains and effort, he had obtained about 40 men from the second *Garde*-Regiment, about 20 men from the Alexander-Regiment, and a platoon of machine-guns from the second reserve machine-gun company in Reinickendorf. Further, the third *Garde*-Field-Artillery-Regiment had provided him with troops and guns, and in the late hours of the night he had received from the garrison headquarters an armoured car, 10 trucks,

and an ambulance wagon, as well as 600 men of the security troops who had defected from Eichhorn as rear cover against the Bötzow brewery and other relief attempts, which, he writes, were still unarmed and, as it would soon be shown, undisciplined. When during the night, around 3 o'clock, he arrived at the barracks of the Alexander-Regiment, which was located in closest proximity to the police headquarters, not a single security guard was to be seen on the approach street (the northwestern part of Alexanderstraße, which ran into the *Alexanderplatz*). Only their commander Dreger had come to meet him in a state of agitation and informed him that the 600 men had been shut in the exercise hall of the Alexander barracks by the Spartacists. Thereupon, Schulze forced his way into the barracks courtyard with his people, where they were greeted with shots, but answered them from all corners of the yard so fiercely that the Spartacists beat a retreat. The 600 were freed and armed from out of the stocks of the Alexander-Regiment.

In the meantime, however, the firing on the headquarters building had commenced. This met with such intense defensive fire from its occupants, it says in Schulze's report, "that already at the first shot the entire team of one gun fell in a hail of machine-gun fire". But the field artillery still proved itself superior. When around 4:30 in the morning the arming of the security troops had finished, Schulze was called because the Spartacist Braun, Eichhorn's representative, wished to speak with him. He asked him what he wanted, and Braun, who according to the statements of several of his people was a man of devious nature, said that he came from the government and had received permission to withdraw. But since he could not provide sufficient written proof, he received the answer that unconditional surrender would still have to be insisted upon. He now requested 10 minutes' time to consider and a white flag, and then went back into the headquarters building. After the ten minutes were up, a man came out with a white flag, but rapidly veered off into a side street was not seen again. Who it was nobody could say. Braun was later taken captive by a patrol in one of the side streets after the building had been stormed.

About the firing, which now continued again, and the capturing of the headquarters, we shall give the word to Schulze's report. It reads:

> Meanwhile, the secondary division under the command of *Feldwebelleutnant* [Sergeant-Major] Westphal had approached the headquarters from Prenzlauerstraße (via Alexanderstraße—Ed. B.). When it turned into it, it came under intensive fire from all the houses. The truck driver of the first car,

on which about 50 men and 10 machine-guns stood, was wounded by a number of machine-gun shots. The car hurtled driverless into a doorway; the occupants flew out, head over heels, and all of them ran for cover in the houses. During this confrontation, the division already had one dead and several wounded. For protection in the direction of the *Alexanderplatz*, a howitzer was now unlimbered and the armoured car sent on ahead. Westphal now stepped up again, and let his people follow on both sides of the street. The guns were coupled to drivable cars and followed closely behind.

In Wadzekstraße, especially strong fire again came from the cellars. After this resistance had been overcome using hand grenades, they proceeded under lively fire from all the houses to the prearranged point of attack, the corner of Kleine Frankfurterstraße and Kaiserstraße. Around 5:45 in the morning, the firing began here. The fire from countless machine-guns from the headquarters was especially dangerous in this narrow street.

The effect of these first shots was enormous. The machine-guns flew through the air to the side; their teams were either killed, or fled. Westphal let 50 shots be fired at the headquarters rapidly one after the other, so that the enemy could not come to their senses again at all. Since the firing now fell silent, Westphal went ahead with two men. In the streets things looked in a bad way. All the windows had been smashed from the impact of the guns; everything that was not firmly nailed fast had fallen down.

When he had arrived at the headquarters, a few Spartacists came out, and Westphal asked them if they were ready to negotiate. They said yes, but explained that they had no commanders, since all of them had fled. Westphal suggested that they should choose some leaders from their midst, with whom negotiations could take place; in the meantime, he would get the surrender conditions from me. My conditions were: "Immediate handover of the red fortress, laying down of all weapons and supplies, internment of prisoners in the Alexander barracks, and the government's judgment over them."

While the people in the headquarters were still arguing about their conditions, they were made aware that the negotiations would have to be broken off, since renewed firing would have to take place. That helped. Everything was accepted unconditionally. The prisoners were led onto the street in group columns and marched with hands raised to the Alexander barracks. The first troop consisted of about 120–150 people. Individual people were still brought in afterwards from the surrounding houses, cellars, etc.

In the headquarters itself after the storming utter confusion reigned. In the dim light of the morning dawn it was impossible to recognise anything. Shots flashed from all corners; frantic shouting filled the atrium. Only through my order, yelled with all my strength, to cease firing and be still, did

> some calm come about. My second warning to the Spartacists that everyone who would now still shoot would immediately be put up against the wall, helped. Now I sent strong patrols up the various passages of the headquarters and ordered them to bring all the prisoners to a certain sport at the exit. Another 2 or 3 or 4 people were found. The rest had hidden themselves in such a way that one could not seize them. After I entered the courtyard of the Alexander barracks, prisoners were still being brought in by people from the security forces and protective troops.

Things went similarly with these prisoners here as with the prisoners from the storming of *Vorwärts*. The soldiers, who had become embittered in the most extreme way by the events of the fighting in the streets, and even more some of the former comrades of the police troops who had remained with Eichhorn, were itching to take vengeance on them for those who had fallen. Just as in the courtyard of the Dragoon barracks, several corpses also lay in the courtyard of the Alexander barracks—five in number—and it was only thanks to the energetic intervention of Schulze that Braun, against whom particular bitterness prevailed, did not also become a victim of mass agitation.

Who should be held to account for the shooting of those who Schulze found dead in the barracks courtyard could not be ascertained. It is not impossible that they had already fallen during the night to the firing that took place during the freeing of the 600 security policemen. After the storming was finished, the courtyard was filled with soldiers of the various outfits as well as civilians, and was the stage for activity that was too confused for a regulated examination to be carried out. *Feldwebelleutnant* [Sergeant-Major] Schulze, who had led the transport of the prisoners to the Alexander barracks, claimed that no shootings of prisoners had been carried out by the Fusiliers.

But it was against these that the rage of the Spartacists and of the workers influenced by them directed itself with quite particular ferocity. The former did not forgive these troops for having stood by the government, and surrounded their barracks with sentries who threatened every soldier who dared to leave the barracks on his own. “Only through rigorous guarding and lively traffic in spying”, it says in the report of commander Schulze, “could I hold on to the barracks”. By night, a searchlight operated without interruption, which illuminated the entire blocks of housing. Despite this, they could not prevent snipers from taking up positions in the *Lazarettgarten* (which bordered the barracks), who held the barracks under fire throughout the entire night.

But these and similar shootings in the newspaper quarter were only outriders of the uprising. This itself had been broken with the fall of the police headquarters. Without difficulty and without bloodshed, it was possible to take the last building that the Spartacists still occupied, the Silesian Railway Station, off them by overrunning it. On 13 January, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards suspended the general strike they had proclaimed. Of the better-known leaders of the uprising, Georg Ledebour had already been arrested on 9 January at the home of the former editor of *Vorwärts* Dr. Ernst Meyer, together with the latter, by *Vizefeldwebel* [Deputy Sergeant] von Tyszka and Private Gürgen, who had left the headquarters with a division of troops in order to arrest Karl Liebknecht, but did not or could no longer locate him. After several months of penal custody, he was exonerated in May 1919 by the High Court of Berlin of the charge of high treason levelled against him. Emil Eichhorn stayed hidden for a few days, and then escaped in a car to Braunschweig.

Notes

1. [Ed. B.—*op. cit.*, p. 85.]
2. [Ed. B.—Ledebour Trial, p. 53.]
3. [Ed. B.—op. cit. p. 52.]
4. [Ed. B.—Noske, *op. cit.*, p. 67.]
5. [Ed. B.—Trial, p. 64.]
6. [Ed. B.—*From Kiel to Kapp*, p. 68.]
7. [Ed. B.—Noske, p. 72.]
8. [Ed. B.—*op. cit.*, p. 72.]
9. [Ed. B.—One should compare with this fact the suspicions of bloodthirstiness levelled against the government at the time by Eichhorn, Ledebour, etc.]
10. [Ed. B.—*Von Kiel bis Kapp*, p. 73.]
11. Ferdinand Runkel, *Die Deutsche Revolution: Ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: Verlag Fr. Wilh. Grumow, 1919).

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CHAPTER 15

The Murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg

A different fate from their fellow insurgents befell Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. They could not resolve to flee, yet in light of the arrest orders that had been issued against them they likewise also avoided their homes. But when the rumour emerged in the press that they had fled to the Dutch border, on 15 January 1919, Karl Liebknecht wrote in an article in the *Rote Fahne*, which presents the Spartacist movement as not to be defeated:

> Hold up now! We have not fled, we are not beaten. And if they throw us into chains—we are here and here we stay! And the victory shall be ours. For *Spartakus*—that means fire and spirit, that means soul and heart, that means will and action of the Revolution of the proletariat. And *Spartakus*—that means all the need and yearning for joy, all the determination to struggle of the class-conscious proletariat. For *Spartakus*—that means socialism and world revolution. The road to Calvary of the German working class is not yet ended—*but the day of salvation draws near*.

In the following night, he and Rosa Luxemburg no longer numbered among the living. In the evening of 15 January, first he and sometime later Rosa Luxemburg were arrested in the suburb of Wilmersdorf at the house of the married couple Markussohn, who were friends of theirs, by troops belonging to the Wilmersdorf *Bürgerwehr* [Civic Defence Force], and delivered to the staff of the Lüttwitz Section of the *Gardeschützenkavallerie*-Division, which was lodging at the Eden Hotel on the Kurfürstendamm,

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M. S. Ostrowski, *Eduard Bernstein on the German Revolution*,
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where they subjected them to a short trial and then decided to transfer them individually under military escort to the Moabit prison on remand. For each of them, however, this transport became their fatal voyage. Karl Liebknecht received, when he stepped out of the hotel in the evening and wanted to get into the car that was being kept ready, two or three blows from the rifle butt of Jäger Otto Runge, who was standing guard in front of the hotel, which were so heavy that he bled severely and almost lost consciousness for a time. A few minutes later he was asked to temporarily leave the car, which had taken the route through the Tiergarten and allegedly had broken down, in order to go a short stretch on foot, and is now supposed to have tried to flee into the undergrowth. When he did not interrupt his flight at the "Halt!" of the military, the official report continues, these fired at him according to military custom, and then, pierced by their shots, he fell to the ground, dead. At the order of Lieutenant Pflugk-Hartung, who was leading the escort, his body was brought to the casualty ward at the Zoological Garden, and handed in as that of somebody unknown. Pflugk-Hartung justifies this later in court with the claim that he had wanted to avoid "the matter becoming known and exaggerated immediately". But he immediately reported the incident to his superior authorities, along with a correct identification of who they had killed. In the same way as for Karl Liebknecht, Runge assaulted Rosa Luxemburg, when she was meant to be transported to the prison by car a quarter of an hour after him. During the drive, the nearly-lifeless Luxemburg is killed by a shot, which probably came from Lieutenant Kurt Vogel. This man is certainly responsible for the fact that the body of the murdered woman was not delivered, but artificially weighed down and hidden in the Landwehrkanal near the Cornelius Bridge, where she was only discovered months later.

The arrest and death of the two heads of the *Spartakus* movement became generally known over the course of 16 January, and naturally provoked great agitation. An official report published on the evening of the same day presented the matter in such a way that the blows they had been dealt had come from unknown people from the midst of the crowd that was surrounding the hotel and shouting insults at them, that the shot that killed Rosa Luxemburg had been fired at her from somebody unknown, who had jumped up out of the crowd of people onto the footboard of the car when it had to drive more slowly because of the crowd, and that her body had been pulled out of the car by some of the crowd that surrounded it, and taken away with the shout "here is Rosa".

These circumscriptions of the true state of things were, however, soon revealed to be misleading. The government immediately resolved to arrange a detailed inquiry into the circumstances under which the death of the two revolutionaries had come about, and announced this in the following notice:

> The government has ordered the strictest inquiry into the circumstances that led to the violent deaths of Dr. Rosa Luxemburg and Dr. Karl Liebknecht. *Both of those who have been killed had doubtless transgressed gravely against the German people* but they also equally doubtlessly had a claim to the law, which punishes the guilty but also protects them from wrongs. An *act of lynch justice*, as seems to have been perpetrated against Rosa Luxemburg, shames the German people, and everybody will morally condemn it, whichever side they may politically stand on. If in the case of Luxemburg *the law was evidently infringed*, then in the case of Liebknecht as well *clarification is needed about whether the action taken was in accordance with legal prescriptions.* If these were infringed, then here too *intervention would be needed in the most severe way.*

For their part, the Central Council of the German Workers' Councils and the Executive Council of the Berlin Workers' Councils took up the examination of the facts of the matter, relatives and friends offered whatever they could to get at the truth, and a range of persons who had been lingering in the hotel or its surroundings at the time in question came forward voluntarily as witnesses against certain claims in the official report. And so, the general public found out already in the next few days that the Eden Hotel had not been surrounded by particularly many civilian persons at the time by any means, that the car that should have brought Rosa Luxemburg to the prison on remand was not deliberately or accidentally stopped in its journey by the public at any time, but rather had taken its route through empty streets, and that hence there could be no question of the body having been forcibly abducted by people from the crowd, but that it had been military types who had given off shouts with the gist that "we must *finish off* the two insurrectionists without further ado".

However, Spartacists and Independents did not just direct their attacks against the military. When it became known that the Majority socialist government had passed the examination and prospective prosecution over to the relevant military authorities, it too became the object of fierce attacks, which were ramped up to the suspicion that it did not want a thorough investigation, but instead felt a certain measure of solidarity

with the "band of murderers". There was self-evidently no question of that. Since the accused belonged to the military, they were covered by the still-existing law according to whose prescriptions their matter was in fact to be examined by military authorities and transferred to a military court for prosecutorial treatment. If the government, or rather its juristic members, argued that it was bound by the legal proposition that nobody could be stripped of his due judge, then that was unanswerable from a formal legal angle. In addition, at that point in time the Republic had not yet made those experiences with military courts that since then have robbed the radically-minded part of the population of any confidence in their political impartiality. Little spoke against leaving the prosecutorial judgment of the case to the military court.

What it came down to above all was not the severity of the punishments that would be adjudged, but rather the establishment, certain beyond all doubt, of all details important for an appraisal of the incident, and the ascertainment and provisional identification of all presumed guilty parties and their accessories. With regard to this, the demand was raised among the workers by members of the most varied parties that the inquiry be handed over to a commission that should be composed either exclusively or at least partially of members of the socialist parties, and this demand could have been yielded to without having violated the law in an unseemly way. After all, we were still in the Revolution, and to be precise in a Revolution whose representatives knew that they wanted to dispense with the military special courts over its course, and the government also did not fail to recognise the objective justification of the demand. It just could not resolve to take that radical step, but restricted itself to bringing about the inclusion of two members each of the Central Council and the Berlin Executive Council to participate in the inquiry, whose leadership however remained with the court of the *Gardeschützenkavallerie*-Division and the overall leadership of the division commander von Hoffmann as the military judge [*Gerichtsherr*]. It soon became clear what a mistake they made by doing so. The military made the workers' representatives feel that they regarded them only as a superfluous accoutrement. The military court counsel [*Kriegsgerichtsrat*] Jörns, appointed by von Hoffmann as the leader of the inquiry, and von Hoffmann himself rejected a number of requests by the workers, whereupon the members of the Executive Council Oskar Rusch and Paul Wegmann and the member of the Central Council Hugo Struve stepped down from participating in the inquiry on 16

February. Their reasons are summarised in the following piece from the introduction to a memorandum about their resignation:

> We demanded the installation of a special commission vested with the rights of an investigating judge. This demand, which we made immediately and repeatedly, was rejected.
>
> We demand further the sentencing of the murders and their instigators through a *proper civil court*.
>
> We reject publicly continuing to take part in the inquiry proceedings, because
>
> 1. This demand of ours was not agreed to on the part of the government of the German Republic,
> 2. Despite repeated verbal and written appeals, the instigators, perpetrators, and abettors known to us through witness statements have not been placed in custody.
> 3. It was hereby possible for some of the accused to flee, and
> 4. There is a danger of obscuration, because it is possible for those who are still at liberty to communicate with one another.
>
> We refuse before the proletarians of the world to take part in a judicial proceeding that makes it possible to erase the traces of the deed and to withhold the murderers from the arms of justice.

Now the violent death of the two revolutionary leaders had brought about a swing in the mood among a significant part of the workers of Berlin to the disadvantage of the government. The rejection of the socialist special commission had intensified this, and so all that was missing was this statement by the three workers' representatives to bring the ill feeling to a head. At the time, it greatly damaged the party of the Majority socialists, and with that also the Republic, which has its true buttress in this party. It enabled certain journalists to portray this party to socialists abroad as the moral accomplice to the murder of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, and as the murderers' accessory after the fact. So even someone like Romain Rolland allowed himself to be misled by a German *littérateur* in Spring 1919 into raising this accusation against the Social-Democratic Party and the government in a long article that ran for three issues of the Parisian *Humanité*. But in fact, it is unfair to the highest degree. Nobody would perhaps be more in the position of bearing witness to this than the author of this work. For by coincidence I was in the Reich Chancery on the

morning of 16 January 1919, exactly at the time that the news arrived that Karl Liebknecht had been shot, and hence I know what dismay and even shock this provoked among the government members who were present. There is not a trace of well-founded evidence that the government or any one of its members encouraged the killing or abetted the murderers even with so much as a syllable. The mistake as which the handover of the inquiry to the military authorities proved itself lay on the political and not the moral side. But it has proved itself unquestionably a political mistake. It does not need to be determined whether military counsel Jörns in leading the inquiry deliberately worked towards obscuring certain details, his energetic behaviour as prosecutor in the trial lends this assumption little leeway. But it is correct that he omitted various aspects during witness questioning that would have contributed substantially to illuminating the facts of the matter. A socialist inquiry commission, free of all military bias, or one that comprised socialists and civil jurists would undoubtedly have brought more to light than Jörns did, and its report would have enjoyed the confidence among wide circles of the people that was denied his. That is what it came down to.

Certainly, he could hardly have discovered the great murderous conspiracy about which Spartacists and their sympathisers fantasised at the time, since it belongs to the realm of fantasy. There was no conspiracy in the juristic sense of this word, but perhaps a collective crime [*Kollektivverbrechen*] born of the hour, in which the military of the Eden Hotel were involved to varying degrees, some as inspirers (with shouts such as: "Beat them to death!" and the like), others directly as instigators, and yet others as helpers and perpetrators. The claim raised by the workers' representatives, that a kind of arrangement had taken place between some of the latter, is very probably true, and should therefore have been taken into consideration most carefully. But whether even the most precise examination would have led to proof sufficient for conviction remains doubtful all the same.

With all collective crimes, the accurate assessment of responsibilities is an almost unresolvable task. What we know in this respect from our own experience of school pranks repeats itself in the most serious forms in later life. Nobody disputes that a brutal, cowardly murder was committed against Rosa Luxemburg. But whether the soldier Runge is to be regarded as the chief perpetrator, since he repeatedly struck the head of the corporeally unusually weak woman so forcefully with his rifle butt without any provocation, so that the victim immediately collapsed unconscious, or the

officer who put a bullet through her head as she lay there without any signs of life, nobody can retrospectively decide. It is even more difficult to gauge the responsibilities regarding Karl Liebknecht's killing. Was this even a murder in the criminal sense of this word? According to the statement of his escorting officers, Liebknecht was shot when he made an attempt to flee, and shooting at a fleeing prisoner is military custom, which regulations sanction. But everyone will agree that military counsel Jörns was right to argue that even if Liebknecht had attempted to flee, this could not have been enough of a reason for the six heavily-armed strong men who were escorting him to shoot without further ado at a man who had already been robbed of his full strength by the hefty blows from Runge's rifle butt. But that aside, it is doubtful whether an attempt to flee actually did take place. Not because, as Liebknecht's followers insisted, that would have been an act of cowardice of which Liebknecht was not capable. Flight would have nothing whatsoever to do with courage or cowardice in such a case. It raises quite a different question. After everything that we have experienced since those days regarding shootings of opponents of the military by their military escorts, one must rather ask whether the alleged attempt to flee was not simply an *avoidance of bodily harassment*. This can be particularly concluded from the medical opinions that indicate that the fatal shots at Liebknecht must have been fired *from nearby*. But if this was the case, then this was not merely an unconsidered or negligent killing, but rather a well-considered, if not sneaky murder. Jörns then also recommended the *death penalty* against the four officers who had fired because they had committed murder. But the court released them, although in its verdict it admitted that there were indications "that an arrangement had taken place among them for Liebknecht's killing".

Whoever, like the writer of this work, sees no atonement in the death penalty for crimes that have been committed will be indifferent that the four officers were spared from it. But it is not all the same that the crime escaped judicial stigma. That at least was owed to the public conscience.

The court emphasised as a mitigating circumstance the great agitation that had taken hold of the population in general under the effect of the *Spartakus* unrest. But this agitation was not mere fantasy, it was of extraordinary depth and did not by any means limit itself to capitalists and petty-bourgeois conformists who were trembling for their property and profit. It also predominated among wide circles of the working population. And it was directed at nobody with greater embitterment than Karl Liebknecht, in whom one saw the chief culprit for these acts of upheaval, which were

so detrimental to the development of the Republic. How great in fact was the blame that Karl Liebknecht incurred at that time, where what mattered was consolidating the foundations of the German Republic, has been shown in the previous chapters. But to him also applies the comment that death is no atonement. The murderous act of violence committed against him only had the effect that a myth grew up around his name, thanks to which the dead Karl Liebknecht would be able to cause harm for much longer than it would have been possible for him to do alive. With all his talents and his radical will, Liebknecht had not been especially popular even in the circle of the radical leadership. In this respect, Emil Barth expresses in his work only in drastic terms what Ledebour had carefully implied in his statement before the court: that they did not hold his contribution in the council of responsible leaders in very high esteem, that there too they found his lack of a sense of political responsibility and his overbearing intellectual self-interest, which the Englishman calls "egotism" in contrast to materially-oriented "egoism", repeatedly quite embarrassing. Already in 1915, when the still-united social-democratic parliamentary group was voting on the proposal to deprive him of his party membership because of continued flouting of party resolutions, only a part of the radical party members had rejected this, but another part shared the embitterment of the party majority about his behaviour, and voted for the motion. But his wilfulness had grown much more, ever since he had come out of prison and was celebrated as a martyr of militarism wherever he showed himself to the masses, and his self-overestimation had risen so much that Barth finds himself justified in speaking of Liebknecht's megalomania. In this overestimation of his power over the masses, and his fantastical depiction of the possibilities of a new subversive overthrow, he had signed every decree through which he presented himself, Ledebour, and Scholze as the representatives of the revolutionary government, which wanted to replace the government put in place by the Central Council of Workers' Councils, and which had now become this in the realms of the unbelievers. But that could have nothing but a destructive effect, and significantly depress his reputation among the workers. That he did not emerge alive from the enterprise that had been unconscionably put into action and led by him and others of a like mind, had the opposite effect in the longer term. It romanticised him and his venture too.

On a human level, one must mourn that this bearer of a famous name, who though he was not especially profound was still endowed with many talents and rare intellectual vigour, met with so violent a death in his

prime. But for all that, the historical verdict on the politician Karl Liebknecht can still only be that his final undertaking showed at the same time how far he lacked the characteristics without which Social Democracy cannot fulfil its great mission as a constructive force.

The other victim of this newly resurgent militarism, Rosa Luxemburg, fell simply as the selfless campaigner for an idea to which she had dedicated her entire being. She too erred in her assessment of the capacity of the Revolution, and her brilliantly-written work about the crisis in Social Democracy, which appeared during the war, also shows why she had to err. In her mind's eye there stood and in her soul there lived a proletariat derived from abstractions, which did not conform to the proletariat as it truly was. As the letters she left behind show, she was after all in the last analysis thoroughly poetical by nature. In her, socialism has lost a highly-talented comrade-in-arms, who could have rendered invaluable services to the Republic if her wrong estimation of what was possible had not led her into the camp of the illusionists of the politics of violence [*Gewaltpolitik*]. But whoever for that reason was her opponent in the party struggle, will still cherish the memory of this restless fighter.

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CHAPTER 16

The General Situation in the First Months of the Republic

The Role of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils

In the science of living creatures, called biology, it is an insight based on experience and experimental examination that organisms become less and less capable of change the higher a stage of development they have blossomed to as far as the specialisation, formation, and functional cooperation of their organs is concerned. With some restrictions arising from the nature of things, this is also the case for the social organisms that we call states or, at an earlier stage of development, tribes [*Stämme*] and peoples [*Völkerschaften*]. The less elaborate they are, the more easily they can bear measures targeted at their radical restructuring. But the more multifaceted their inner structure, the more elaborate their division of labour and the cooperation of their organs already is, the greater the danger of grave damage to their living capacities, if an attempt is made to radically restructure their form and content through the use of forceful means in a short time. Regardless of whether they accounted for this theoretically or not, the authoritative leaders of Social Democracy grasped this from their insight into their actual conditions, and oriented their practice in the Revolution accordingly.

But they were also able to do this without thereby harming the cause of socialism. As backward as Germany was through the continued existence of semi-feudal institutions and the powerful position of the military in important questions of its political life, as an administrative state it had still attained a stage of development at which the mere democratisation

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of the available institutions already represented a significant step towards socialism. The first signs of this had already become visible before the Revolution. The partial democracy that had been realised in Reich, states, and communities had proven itself an effective lever under the influence of the workers' representatives, who had forced their way into legislative and administrative bodies, to foster laws and measures that lie along the lines of socialism, so that even Imperial Germany was able to compete with politically more advanced countries in these areas. But at the same time, in association with the organs of free workers' self-management, it had provided a constantly growing number of representatives of the workers' cause with an understanding of the nature and tasks of legislation and administration in modern society, which they would never have acquired to the same degree without it. Hence, one could and can expect that democratisation in itself may already bring to fruition the germs of socialisation.

But it takes time for anything to bear fruit, and in a revolution, the majority of the people does not reckon with years. The masses want to see immediate material results. The workers' and soldiers' councils that had emerged in various places even before the outbreak of the Revolution seemed quite particularly suited to achieving these, and after it came about, they spread so fast that eventually no locality of any significance was without its own workers' and soldiers' council. We have seen how the *Spartakus* League set itself the goal of transforming Germany into a council republic after the Russian model, and even if it did not succeed in winning over the majority despite its zealous agitation, pursued with significant means, this agitation nevertheless had the effect that in a great number of workers' councils, as we shall call them for brevity's sake, since in most places the soldiers' representatives played no noteworthy role, very exaggerated notions took root about their tasks and capacities.

Where this was the case, where the workers' councils claimed to wield the highest political power in the place, they soon naturally had to run into more or less severe tensions with the incumbent local authorities. Since in the febrile days of the Revolution the most expert elements had not always been elected to the councils, but skilfully—affected goodwill often achieved success in the election, the air soon reverberated with complaints about the presumptuous demeanour and financially wasteful conduct of inexpert workers' councils. While the bourgeoisie submitted to the ordinances of the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* for an extended period of time without any notable protests, it gave off all the more cries of woe about the local

organs of the Revolution, which is how we have to regard the workers' and soldiers' councils.

Not without reason in all cases. Many mistakes were made, partly through lack of expertise, or rather experience, partly through overestimating the immediate effects of shifts in political power relations on economic life. People who understood next to nothing of administrative affairs considered themselves competent to interfere in the technicalities of the administrative work of trained representatives and officials, and to mandate measures whose implementation threatened to cause the greatest confusion in the communities' finances. A series of workers' councils authorised daily allowances for their members which significantly exceeded the income of well-paid qualified workers, without their having performed notable communal-political or economic-policy work in return. They held endless sessions in which there was nothing but talking, and thereby began to cause fruitless disquiet in people's minds. Others became guilty of severely neglecting the tasks that rested with them, such as securing *Heer* property and the like. In short, there was no lack of reason for justified grievances. But these were exorbitantly exaggerated and generalised to a completely unjustified degree. There was talk of the squandering of millions, where at most it was a matter of a couple of hundred thousand marks, and at the same time utter silence about the high value, running to several millions, of the sums that were rescued for the general public by workers' councils or through their influence. Overall, the workers' councils were of significantly greater value than the costs they caused. In the first weeks of the Revolution, when the waves of general excitement surged high and Germany seemed threatened by collapse into anarchy, they had a calming effect on the masses simply through their presence, and the majority of them also proved themselves a positive counter-force against any agitations that aimed to incite the masses to rioting. They won concessions on thoroughly appropriate measures for the benefit of the poorer popular classes from many old-fashioned communal administrations. In most localities, they were under the influence of people who through years of activity in prominent positions in Social Democracy and the trade union movement as deputies, workers' secretaries, or as local trade union leaders, had gained enough insight into the relations of social life and necessities of political economy to be inured against being led astray by sonorous slogans. As was shown at the Council Congress in mid-December 1918, the sense for how to implement socialist reforms through the economic organisation of workers and employees and organically

constructive legislation held sway with them. If turning the Revolution down this route, as soon as the unrestricted democratic franchise and the full self-government of the nation were secured, lay in the well-conceived interest of the working class, then it also offered the bourgeois classes of Germany the advantage of a new formation of things that was compatible with the level of social development it had reached, and which ruled out arbitrary disruptions of economic life.

In general, the workers' as well as the soldiers' councils of Germany were counselled by the spirit of its Social Democracy and the social-democratic trade union movement. As far as the soldiers' councils are concerned, two announcements of the Executive Committee of the Soldiers' Council for the *Oberste Heeresleitung*, published on 25 November 1918 following a conference held in Ems, express this extremely well. The first was directed at the soldiers' council of the field *Heer*, and addresses them, with reference to the endeavours of the newly-created Poland to bring purely German territories under Polish rule:

> Comrades! Such intentions may sound however they want, this occurrence warns us of discord and dissolution. Unified and unanimous we must flock around our Reich government, borne by the confidence of the working people, only then will this attain the degree of influence needed to build a peace between peoples [*Völkerfrieden*] that protects the German people from being torn apart as a nation and secures its right to self-determination.

A longer appeal directed to the "workers' and soldiers' councils at home" warns of "bothering" the returning troops "through measures by the security services that are not badly-meant but nonetheless perceived as insulting". They could take weapons and munitions away from scattered comrades, but should leave them to whole bodies of troops. All fears attached to this were devoid of any justification. For, it continues,

> We know from negotiations with the representatives of the soldiers' councils of the field *Heer* that the front troops are unreservedly on the side of the Ebert-Haase government that has emerged from our state revolution. Along with its working brethren at home, the field *Heer* also wants the democratisation and socialisation of our country. But for that reason it objects in the sharpest way to all attempts to thwart the realisation of the *Nationalversammlung* panned by the current government. The field troops want to share in the decision about the further development of the Reich!

> The field *Heer* wants peace and the ordered construction of the new Reich, and rejects the idea of abusing this victory over the previous dictators to achieve a new dictatorship, because this could blight the peace we have yearned for and abandon the German people to dying of hunger.
>
> Comrades and workers! From the bottom of its heart the field *Heer* thanks you for your liberating actions at home. You have carried out the long-aspired-to rejuvenation of Germany and created the preconditions for a happier existence for your returning brothers. But where any attempt should be made to determine the final development of the Fatherland by shutting out the field *Heer* and the democracy that was consistently demanded by the working people, we ask you to oppose such an endeavour with all your means.

The great majority of the front soldiers indeed proved themselves in this time to be determined enemies of any agitation aimed at toppling the republican government. But only a few were prepared to serve the Republic as volunteers after their units were dissolved. The overwhelming majority floated back to domestic life and their civilian jobs. How things stood with the home troops we have seen in the previous chapters.

That it was precisely the soldiers' council for the *Oberste Heeresleitung* that delivered this unreserved affirmation of the democratic Republic and socialism shows how widely the enthusiasm about the insurrection of 9 November had spread. For the group only partly consisted of workers and employees who were close to them. A great part belonged to other popular classes.

What the Republic Achieved for the Workers

For the bourgeoisie in its various *strata*, and other propertied classes, it was enough for the moment that the Republic maintained state order and a legal situation that secured property against arbitrary infringements and thereby kept trade and commerce flowing. They were conscious that they could not expect any more than that of the Republic, and that no monarchic government could have guaranteed them more in the given circumstances. They had every cause to be satisfied for the time being. But how did things stand in this respect with the workers? What had the Republic brought them?

Though it is right that it was also an advantage for the workers if trade and commerce did not suffer any interruption, but rather in contrast could

unfold themselves again more strongly, it was barely to be expected that they would be satisfied with this outcome of the completed political revolution. They would also not have understood it if, appealing to Lassalle, anyone had tried for the time being to point out to them that in an advanced industrialised state, the realisation of democracy will necessarily bring with it as much socialism as the given economic development makes possible at all. They demanded, and had the right to demand, that a start should be made on this immediately.

The first step in this direction was also not long in coming. They are the social-policy measures ordered with immediate legal force under points 7 to 9 of the appeal by the *Rat der Volksbeautragten* of 12 November 1918, even there enumerated as imminent: removal of the coercive provisions of the Auxiliary Service Law, the Servants' Law, the exceptional provisions against agricultural workers, restoration of the industrial safety provisions suspended during the war, introduction of an eight-hour legal limit to the working day, support for the unemployed from public means, extension of the scope of medical insurance, and more of the like—measures that each individually left the capitalist nature of the economic order fundamentally untouched, but which together significantly narrowed the dominance of capital over the workers, and substantially raised the social position of the workers' towards property. In particular, the ordinance that lifted the emergency laws against agricultural workers—that is, which gave them the right to organise themselves—soon proved to be social-politically very effective. In due course, the ordinance about supporting the unemployed from public means also proved itself to be a measure that fundamentally cut deep into the essence of the capitalist societal order. But initially this and other similar measures that followed soon after were able to change little about the workers' economic situation, so long as economic life itself was not to some degree brought again into a regulated course, and the war was also ended in political economy as well. This urgent first task forbade every unconsidered infringement in the foundations of political-economic conditions for enterprise and intercourse. The measures that fell under the concept of socialisation in the narrower sense of the word had to be carefully thought over and carefully worked out, for them to have appropriate effects.

Recognising this, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* had already entrusted a commission of socialists trained in political economy and socialistically-inclined teachers of political economy—Professors Karl Ballod, Emil

Lederer, Th. Vogelstein, and Robert Willbrandt, as well as the members of Social Democracy Heinrich Cunow, Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Hue, Karl Kautsky, and Robert Schmidt—with the task of examining the question of socialisation and providing a report as soon as possible about the measures that should be taken in hand immediately. This commission, which chose Karl Kautsky as its chairman, published a provisional draft report on 10 December 1918, which is to be regarded as a programme of its works. The introductory passages of this report read:

> The commission is conscious that the societalisation of the means of production can only come about in a longer-lasting organic construction. The first precondition of all economic reorganisation is the revival of production. Above all, Germany's economic situation peremptorily demands the resumption of an export industry and foreign trade.
>
> The commission is of the view that for these branches of the economy the previous organisation must still be retained for the present. Likewise, the initiation of industry demands the maintenance and extension of credit circulation, and with that the undisturbed functioning of credit banks.
>
> In the interest of our food supply, the commission also does not propose to intervene in the previous property and operation conditions of the peasant population. Here, productivity shall be raised and intensity increased by measures adapted to agriculture and with the support of the cooperatives.

With that, it was indicated to the workers that the immediately imminent measures of the Republic would not bring any organisational change in enterprise forms, and would leave property in companies fundamentally untouched—and also why. Given the great regard that the socialist co-signatories of the report enjoyed among the socialist working class, objections were not raised from among their ranks to these explanations, especially as the report continued:

> By contrast, the commission is of the view that those domains of political economy in which capitalist-monopolistic power relationships have taken shape come *prima facie* into consideration for socialisation. In particular, the collectivity is due control over the most important raw materials, such as coal and iron. It should be examined what other branches of production and power generation are suited, as a result of their extensive concentration, to being transferred into common ownership, which branches of the economy otherwise come into consideration for socialisation in accordance with their nature, like e.g. insurance and mortgage banking.

It then goes on to explain that the success of socialisation depends on raising productivity, which "must be achieved by the best organisation of enterprises and saving all unnecessary circulation costs *under the leadership of proven technicians and tradesmen*", explained that the *forms*, *means*, and *organs* of socialisation are to be determined according to the *nature* of the economic branches in question. Finally, it argues that it is expedient, when taking over enterprises, to compensate the previous owners through redemption rents [*Ablösungsrenten*]. "It is then a political decision", it says at the end, "in what scope, above all along the lines of wealth levies and property taxation, the general inclusion of all propertied classes comes about."

Taken as a whole, the report lent itself strongly to instilling in the business world the confidence in the ordered course of business life that it needs to make plans to spend greater means on new investments and innovations, as well as to enter into far-reaching contracts—all things that the working class is naturally interested in as well. But one thing could also have happened beyond this as well at the time. The impression of the insurrection of the working class on the bourgeois classes was still too fresh for an ordinance that secured the general public's property in natural resources—with the assurance of moderate settlements for those who held private rights to them, where these existed—to have met with any notable objections. The idea of easing the later work of the socialisation of coalmining, etc., through such an ordinance with legal force, was also raised at a joint meeting of members of the Socialisation Commission with the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*. However, it did not cut through, because the majority wanted to keep back so large an infringement in private rights for the *Nationalversammlung*, which one hoped—and at that point in time could still hope—would result in a socialist majority.

For the same reason, the great majority of workers also agreed to leave the work of socialisation legislation to the *Nationalversammlung*. The associations that workers' trade union organisations and business-owners' federations had partly entered into already in the last years of the war, under the name of workers' communities [*Arbeitergemeinschaften*], which ensured the workers a quasi-automatic increase in their wages in case of a rise in their living costs, became generalised and consolidated. Even though, from a wider political-economic perspective, they were not without their downsides, since they could easily lead to making certain categories of workers allies of business-owners against consumers, in the given conditions they were still a means of keeping the transition from

a war to a peacetime economy free from serious tensions, and were encouraged for this reason by the Republic's government and in particular the Demobilisation Office.

Apart from this, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* was initially concerned to realise the legislation it had announced to protect workers by means of ordinances.

Already on 13 November 1918, an ordinance appeared that laid down the fundamental principles of unemployment provisions. Under it, this fell to the communities, along with the obligation to transfer the payment and control of this support under certain preconditions to the workers' associations. The ordinance was extended on 24 December that same year by a directive that obligated communities to continue to insure the unemployed with the health insurance funds [*Krankenkassen*], or they would otherwise have to guarantee them the same medical aid or one of equivalent value. In addition, it was ordered on the same day that in cases of temporary retrenchment or suspension of business workers were likewise to be compensated. An ordinance of 23 November 1918 contained provisions for the corresponding implementation of the eight-hour day in bakeries and pâtisseries. An ordinance of 5 December 1918 secured troops who had been released from service the continuation of support until further notice. On 7 December 1918, an ordinance ensured workers in the Berlin metal industry the right to special compensatory allowances in case of reductions in their working time, and on 9 December 1918 an ordinance was issued that dealt with the expansion and democratic transformation of public work performance records. This was supplemented by two significant ordinances, of which one—ordinance of 23 December 1918—created a collective bargaining law [*Tarifrecht*] that made it possible to declare pay scales agreed between business and workers' associations to be generally binding, and individual arrangements that set wages lower than the pay scales to be invalid (the "absoluteness [*Unabdingbarkeit*] of pay scales"), created arbitration committees in whose formation the associations would have a say, regulated arbitration procedures and installed the Reich Labour Ministry as the central conciliatory authority; and the second—ordinance of 4 January 1919—subjected the arbitrary will of business-owners in the hiring and firing of workers [*Arbeiter*] to far-reaching restrictions, which later (ordinance of 24 January 1919) were also extended to the hiring and firing of employees [*Angestellte*].

All these ordinances about the expansion of workers' insurance, and a series of others born of the same spirit, might not appear particularly

revolutionary, viewed individually. But in their connection, and in view of the fact that they did not claim to be more than the first steps on the way to creating a socialist workers' law, they signified the start of a revolution in working conditions, which went as far as Germany's difficult economic situation permitted at all. It was naturally easy to formulate demands in each individual case that went beyond what was laid down in these ordinances. The *Spartakus* League under the leadership of Karl Liebknecht and the Bolshevists agitating in Germany (Leviné in Essen and others) also did not pass up the opportunity to oppose the ordinance about the limitation of the working day to 8 hours maximum with the demand for a 6-hour working day, and to start an agitation in the Rhenish-Westphalian coal district, as well as in the lignite basins of Central Germany, that initially purportedly aimed to bring about a great strike for the six-hour shift, but whose actual purpose was to win the mineworkers over to the Bolshevist politics of violence. Naturally, they could not deny the fact that Germany's economic situation made it nigh-on impossible to bear as strong a reduction in the production and price increase of the products of the coal industry as this shortening of shift times would have led to at least for the next few years. Germany was more than ever consigned to exporting industrial products in order to be able to import foodstuffs. But this did not bother the leaders of the *Spartakus* tendency. Karl Liebknecht was—there is no other possible expression for this—unscrupulous enough to tell the young people listening raptly to him in popular gatherings that there could be no question of difficulties with food nourishment for Germany; if it struck out as a council republic and helped to bring about world revolution, food would stream towards it from all sides. Through such coarse portrayals [*Vormalereien*] they also succeeded in making an impression on the backward elements and semi-mature youth of the working world, and brought about tumultuous demonstrations in the coal districts under the cry "Fight for the six-hour shift", which were presented by Liebknecht in his final articles as a sign of impending victory. That is not what they were. In the Ruhr district, when it came to a decision several months later, the mass of the mineworkers did not let themselves be reeled in, but rejected taking part in the strike following the advice of their representatives. The only thing that was achieved were bloody clashes between deluded mobs and the organs of state power, which had to protect the mines from attempts at destructive intrusions. And the Ruhr district only echoed in a limited domain the picture that the stance of the entire working class of Germany towards the Republic presented. Minorities allowed

themselves to be carried away into a stance of hostile opposition, but the overwhelming majority of the workers grasped that the democratic Republic was *their* Republic, and very soon indicated that unambiguously.

Difficulties of the Republic's Foreign Policy

The news of the overthrow of the Kaiser and the proclamation of the Republic for the German Reich and in its individual states was initially received favourably almost without exception abroad. Even in those countries that had been allied with Germany, as well as in neutrals that felt themselves more strongly drawn to it than to the leading states in the camp of the Entente, the Kaiser's regime had been unpopular, and there too its bearer Wilhelm II enjoyed the furthest-reaching mistrust. But if the organs of the Entente countries' governments did not hesitate to openly express their satisfaction about the political revolution that had taken place in Germany, all the same they did not fail at the same time to issue all manner of caveats in this. In various registers they declared that, before coming to a final judgment, they had to wait and see how the new Germany would arrange and conduct itself—whether the change of government would remain limited to merely more of a change in form, or whether all the institutions of the old system and all compromised persons would be thoroughly swept away.

Reasonably construed, this question could be seen as justified. But in the way that it was soon interpreted by leading papers in the two main countries of the Entente, it placed the Republic before an insoluble task. Where was the gauge for determining which personalities were compromised? Quite apart from papers that, like the protectionist London *Morning Post*, insisted that the entire German people altogether was to blame for the war and wartime misdeeds, for papers with the influence of the Parisian *Le Temps* even the political leaders of the party of the Majority socialists were among those who were politically compromised, since they had only been "the Kaiser's socialists". According to this paper, in August 1914, the Reichstag, which Wilhelm II's government had after all only summoned once war was already here, had voted in favour of the war *en bloc*. So, logically, only a Germany that was led by Independent socialists or Spartacists could have satisfied the demands of *Le Temps* and likeminded papers. But externally, a government by the Spartacists meant government by allies of Russia's Bolshevists, against whom England and France were then preaching a crusade and sponsoring rebellions, and internally within

Germany meant anarchy in the worst sense of the word. Meanwhile, the Independents had answered the Majority socialists' question of whether they would be prepared to take over government alone should the situation arise with a very resolute No. This party also comprised elements that were far too varied and was far too weak in number to be able to govern Germany. A socialist government without Majority Social Democracy was already impossible due to the relative strength of the two parties, but could also not come about because this latter party in its inner unanimity and political training was alone in the position of unfolding the degree of potential state-forming capacity without which a country like Germany was not to be governed at all.

Le Temps in Paris, the *Times* in London, and the politicians standing behind these and other likeminded papers exaggerated the war policy of the Majority socialists and treated the campaign waged by them and by the two parties of the bourgeois left since 1917 for a negotiated peace as if it had not happened at all. They sought to find a way of presenting even a Germany that had become a democratic Republic as a political formation that had to have the screws put on it as harshly as possible so that it would not wreak havoc again in the foreseeable future. Their policy was aptly identified by John Maynard Keynes in his work about the economic effects of the Treaty of Versailles as having contrived guarantees for peace that each provoked fresh rancour, thereby made a revanchist movement more likely, against which then again increased oppressive measures were declared to be necessary. Over the course of the period addressed here, the harsh armistice conditions devised by the military profiteer Foch made a start in this. They had the effect of pouring ice-cold water on a great part of those friends of peace in Germany who had hoped that the enemy would show a certain degree of trust in Germany now it had become a Republic. Yet on 23 October 1918, in his answer to the note from the German government on 20 October, President Wilson added the remark that the Allies would "task their military advisors with working out armistice conditions that would ensure them the *unlimited power* to make sure of and put in force the individual details of the peace to which the German government said it was prepared", and in fact that allowed for the furthest-reaching interpretation. But between those days and the day of the proclamation of the armistice conditions lay a political overturning in Germany of a scope and a depth that Wilson and his allies could not have expected, and that Foch did not pay the slightest heed to this revolution, and deliberately made the delegates of the Republic feel this, dealt a considerable blow

to the political influence of precisely those German politicians who had preached the Revolution to their people as the lever of reconciliation with the democracies of the West, and had propagandised in favour of it. When the conditions became known, the heartiest champion of this idea, Kurt Eisner, issued in the name of the Republic of Bavaria that near-despondent telegraphic appeal of 10 November 1918 to the governments and peoples of the Western states, in which he emphatically outlined what a destructive effect carrying out these provisions risked having on the young Republic of Germany, and closed with the words:

> The Allied democrats must not forget how much silently borne sacrifice of countless nameless Germans has been made since the start of this war in clear recognition of this guilt, and the governments of the Allied powers must not take on the responsibility before the proletarian masses of again destroying the International in the moment where it has inwardly reunited. The fate of humanity lies in the hands of men who are now answerable for bringing about peace and the new formation of the shattered peoples.

Since the armistice was signed already the next day in Compiègne, this call could have changed nothing about its provisions even if it had proved capable of influencing the mind of the man who had the deciding say on questions of this kind in the council of the Allied statesmen, Georges Clemenceau. All the same, Eisner did not let his hope falter. At the Reich Conference of German Free States on 25 November 1918 he still claimed to know on the basis of personal reports, that Clemenceau and his colleagues would show greater accommodation towards a Germany represented by unreserved supporters of the new order than a Germany that left personalities in preeminent positions who had been officials or helpers of the *Kaiserreich*. That certainly contradicts the account that Keynes gives of Clemenceau's policy in the Allied council. According to that, Clemenceau aimed with an iron tenacity to debilitate Germany through a peace treaty to the point of complete impotence, like the one the Romans imposed on the Carthaginians. Now that may be somewhat exaggerated, but even if it hit on the truth, the German Republic's interest in self-preservation prescribed that it offer the keen-eyed ruler of the French Republic and his following as little evidence as possible for the thesis with which he defended his policy, namely that Germany in its nature had remained the same even under the Republic as it had been under the *Kaiserreich*. It must be admitted

that at the time the rulers of the German Republic did not do everything necessary to convince the not-yet-prejudiced world of the injustice of this thesis.

This task was certainly not a very easy one. As little as one can overturn the political economy of a developed industrial country overnight from the ground up and thereby give it a completely different class composition, just as little can one staff the important offices of a country overnight with entirely new persons from those circles that had been shut out from a career in these offices was hitherto. That is namely what the socialist *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* would have had to do if it had filled, e.g., the Foreign Ministry and the Diplomatic Service of the Republic exclusively with people who were fully on the side of the Republic and of socialism. Since they did not find that feasible without having to entrust very important affairs of the Republic to persons who lacked the education and experience necessary for fulfilling them, they believed they were required to hold screenings among the stock that the old system had left behind, under the principle of 'the least of all evils'. We have seen how, when Dr. Solf was found ineligible to be the Republic's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the choice in the search for his successor fell on Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau, who was not more Imperial nor more Republican in his inclinations than Solf, but who seemed suited to the post because, as his reports dispatched to the Berlin Foreign Office during the war showed, he surpassed Solf in worldly wisdom [*Weltklugheit*] and candid judgment of Berlin's diplomatic measures. Yet one day, on a very important occasion—the representation of the Republic at Versailles—the man in question was to commit a mistake that Solf, who was less inclined to demonstrations, would hardly have made, and hardly had his appointment become known than *Le Temps* and other French papers had immediately reported that he had, as ambassador for the *Kaiserreich* in Copenhagen, engaged in no less compromising business on its behalf than what his relative Graf Bernstorff had been accused of doing in Washington. And to think that it had been prominent members of Independent Social Democracy whose eye had fallen on that personally genial man. Later it then became clear with Brockdorff-Rantzau's successor, the social democrat Hermann Müller, that one does not necessarily have to be a professional to be able to imbue the post of the Republic's Minister for Foreign Affairs with skill and tact, but rather that in certain circumstances good political training and a general knowledge of world politics can replace specific professional training in this case quite well. However, this experience evidently first had to be

made, and the parliamentary Secretary of State, as one calls a Minister selected from the parliament in England, needs in any case to have professionally—trained officials beside him, in order to be able to properly carry out the tasks of his office.

At Germany's Western border, the Republic only had to deal with the Allies, towards whom its conduct was prescribed by the nature of things. It was different at the Eastern border. There, the situation was still fully in flux. For the greatest part, this concerned the Poles, whose republic itself was still only taking shape, and in the Northeast it meant taking a position towards the states of the peripheral peoples previously ruled by Russia, which were likewise still in the process of emerging. The inheritance that the *Kaiserreich* had left behind for the Republic there was not exactly edifying. It had awakened the appetite and suffocated the friendly inclination of the Poles, who at the start of the war had been rather more favourably disposed towards the Germans, by the creation of a parody of a Kingdom of Poland, agreed with the Viennese *Hofburg*, which was not even going to encompass all of Congress Poland, and which had only not had a German prince imposed on it because there were too many possible candidates. But the peripheral peoples in the Baltics, who aspired to autonomy, it had straightforwardly antagonised through its imposition of class government from the circles of German estate-owners, in order to secure for Wilhelm II the crown and title of Duke of Courland. Sadly, the Republic did not immediately realise the need to radically dissolve this inheritance.

Where Poland is concerned, what had to be clarified above all was what the border with this new state would be. The only thing that was certain about this was that it could not stay the same as the one that had divided the part of the former Kingdom of Poland that had fallen to Prussia from the part that had fallen to Russia—Congress Poland—and that the Poles in the overwhelmingly Polish parts of Prussia would insist on unification in one state with the Republic of Poland that was now constituting itself. Movements that had this as their aim had also immediately established themselves once the defeat of Imperial Germany was sealed. But initially they restricted themselves to forming national committees, with deposing German local authorities here and there following the Revolution, whose place was taken by Poles, and forming a Polish national council.

The socialist government of Prussia, now that it become a Republic, initially tried to reach an understanding with the Poles that made it possible

to avert acts of violence and bloody confrontations until the final settlement of the German-Polish border through the peace treaty. On 20 November 1918, it dispatched the Democrat H. von Gerlach, who had been entrusted with the office of Undersecretary in the Ministry of the Interior, and who enjoyed great trust among the Poles as a result of his stringent campaign against the *hakatist* policy of the old Prussian government, to Posen, in order to inform himself about the state of affairs *in situ*, and especially to acquire statements from the Poles about their wishes.[1] Gerlach explained in the book *The Collapse of German Policy towards Poland*, published by the Bund Neues Vaterland, that at the time he still found tolerable conditions in Posen. The governor of the province and the president of the district of Posen claimed to him that after some wild actions, in general calm had set in once again, and praised the new Polish *Oberbürgermeister* [senior mayor] of the City of Posen as a reasonable man of moderate temperament. The Poles limited their immediate demands to concessions in the language question, in the question of Polish religious education, and the suspension of various exceptional provisions, and declared themselves content to leave the future Polish-German borders to be determined by the peace conference. Yet they added that it was a prerequisite for maintaining calm that no troops from outside the locality [*ortsfremde Truppen*] be dispatched to the province in addition to the garrison troops who were already present. Only under this precondition would Germany be able to count on continued food deliveries from the province. The Posen workers' and soldiers' council, which was composed of Polish and German workers, expressed itself in this vein as well.

When he had returned to Berlin and reported his impressions to the cabinet, Gerlach spoke vigorously in favour of holding fast to the policy of reaching an understanding with Poland as long as at all possible, and to refrain from sending any troops to Posen. Only some of the government members agreed with him about this. Another group, however, defended the opinion that they had to give the Germans in Posen security against further violations by the Poles by strengthening the German garrison. Only if the Poles saw that they were serious would they avoid the kinds of acts of violence against Germans that were being reported day in, day out. Indeed, the press was full of such reports, whereby many readers easily allowed themselves to be misled into believing that the anti-German movement was worse than it actually was at the time. In substance, the government adopted Gerlach's point of view, but allowed the

Heeresleitung, which was urging for this, to set up a Supreme Command *Heimatschutz-Ost* [Homeland Protection-East], to protect the German Eastern border from Polish aggressive intentions, and an appeal for volunteers to register for the *Heimatschutz* was distributed to the German people. But even this was not enough for the nationalists. In the press and in gatherings they accused the government of having been talked into an abstentionist policy by Gerlach, which would only have the effect of encouraging the Poles to new violent deeds, and derided Gerlach for having let himself be made a fool of by the Poles through their honeyed words "over a drink". In fact, it was precisely their attacks on the Poles, and the threats they levelled against them, which evidenced their complete failure to recognise Germany's situation, that had the effect of intensifying the contradictions in Posen. The Poles now form ever stronger Polish-nationalist defence forces to support their endeavours. Soon new confrontations follow, which are an opportunity for the German *Heeresleitung* now really to send *Heimatschutz* troops into the Posen area. The Germans there bombard the government with pleas for strong intervention, but it still holds fast to the policy of mediation represented by Gerlach. As a result of events in the district town of Witkowo, where a military dictatorship was proclaimed by the Germans, in mid-December Ministers Hirsch and Ernst travel to Posen, with von Gerlach once again, and engage in detailed discussions with the civilian and military authorities there, as well as representatives of the Polish national council and its German equivalent, which had been founded in the meantime. As a result, the following précis of the government's stance is published:

> The government finds a special *Heimatschutz* for the Province of Posen to be unnecessary. By contrast, a border force is absolutely required to take over the Eastern *Heer* and to prevent the export of foodstuffs. The border force is to comprise indigenous troops (i.e., those garrisoned in the same area in peacetime), under the control of the soldiers' councils. The soldiers' councils do not have the power to give orders. The troops from foreign areas that are currently still stationed in the province are to be immediately withdrawn, as soon as troops from the relevant general commands are available, which are composed of cohorts who are obligated to perform military service and volunteers.

Despite this, national agitation on both sides intensified more and more. From Poland, it was especially the former Reichstag deputy Korfanty and the piano virtuoso Ignacy Paderewski who stoked the movement to

multiply the political power-centres in Posen in words and in writing by supplanting German with Polish authorities, and on the German side too they accommodated this changeover where the relative populations made it indisputable. They appealed to the fact that Posen owed its economic and cultural revival to German administration, but made no impression whatsoever on the elements gripped by Polish-nationalist agitation with this argument, which was so often misused by the *hakatists*. If the Poles failed by high-handedly pre-empting ever more of the territorial changes expected from the conclusion of peace, then the Germans committed mistakes after mistakes by not recognising in time what had become unarguable through the world war and the Revolution, and failed to do voluntarily what they ought to have told themselves they would shortly have to do anyway. Thus, the government allowed itself to be misled, among others by representatives of the old system within the Ministry, to postpone indefinitely the call for communal elections in Posen in accordance with the equal franchise proclaimed for Prussia, in order to avert confrontations. But these took place all the same. In the Christmas week, on the occasion of Paderewski's sojourn in Posen, after a German regiment had forcibly removed and demonstratively torn up Entente flags that had been hung up in honour of that man—this at a time where the Entente had the decisive say over the new contours of the German Eastern border!—it came to bloody street fighting, which resumed the next day and spilled out into the province. Proper battles take place between sets of troops, in which sometimes Germans and sometimes Poles are victorious, but whose overall result is that the Germans are compelled to retreat ever more before the greater military force of the Poles, and by mid-January 1919, pretty much the entirety of Posen, which is overwhelmingly populated by Poles, is under Polish control, and seat of the German governor of the province has to be relocated to Bromberg. The relations with the emerging Polish Republic were the most unedifying imaginable.

No less unedifying were they with the emerging republics in the Baltic territories. After the downfall of the government of Germany's Kaiser, there arose an immediate endeavour to develop the partial autonomy that Germany had offered to the peripheral peoples of Russia into a full one. But there was no strong inclination towards imitating Russia's Bolshevists. For protection against these, the first republican governments that took shape there were entirely content for the German troops that occupied the Baltic lands to continue staying there for the time being, and the Entente

even insisted that the German garrison hung on there to strengthen the resistance to incoming Bolshevist regiments should the need arise. The Majority socialist and trade union leader August Winnig, who had been dispatched there by the socialist government as the Republic's commissary [*Kommissar*], and who was until then an extraordinarily well-respected party member on account of his calm and sagacious manner and high creative drive, initially also met with a right friendly reception among the new governments and was well-regarded among the higher-ranking German officers as well.

But the ground was undermined. The situation was especially festering among the Latvians in what was previously Courland, the majority of whose socialists aspired to a more radical revolution than what had been accomplished so far. Agitators of the Bolshevists supported this movement and provoked uprisings that were only to be suppressed with armed force. Since landed property and capital in Courland were primarily in the hands of Germans, this movement bore among the masses at the same time nationalist and anti-German characteristics, and so it came about that Winnig took a brusquer stance against it than he would probably have done otherwise, and fell ever more under the influence of the German military. In Germany, he supported the movement in favour of strengthening the troop contingent in the Baltic Northeast—the technical expression for the entire territory in question on both sides of the border—which in the first instance had only been supposed to serve as a border force and to monitor the return transport of the prisoners coming back from Russia, but in the given circumstances assumed the character of an army [*Wehrmacht*] that was specially prepared to fight against the radical popular classes in the border territory as well as against Soviet Russia, and thus helped make Germany's relations with the latter even more hostile than they were anyway. Two further official statements by the government of the *Volksbeauftragte*, which are significant for its stance towards the Bolshevist government of Russia, may be reproduced here, in addition to what was said regarding this in earlier chapters.

1. On 18 November 1918, the cabinet held a detailed debate about relations with Soviet Russia, with the participation of the then-Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Solf and Karl Kautsky, who was installed at his side as his Assistant. Hugo Haase, who dealt with questions of foreign policy in the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten*, gave a report about the discussions exchanged with Moscow. As a result, a

longer telegram was sent to Moscow, signed by Dr. Solf and Karl Kautsky, whose most important passages are the following:

The questions posed by the members of the Russian government in the telephone conversation with *Volksbeauftragter* Haase as well as in the various telegrams to representatives of the German government were put on the agenda in the cabinet of the German people's government [*Volksregierung*]. The following came up:

Before all guarantees, the council government directed a radio message to all the workers', soldiers', and sailors' councils of Germany, in which it says the following:

"Soldiers and sailors, do not give up your weapons, or the united capitalists will drive you apart. It is a matter of truly taking over power everywhere with the weapons in your hand, and to form a workers', soldiers', and sailors' government with Liebknecht at its head. Do not let yourselves be talked into any national assembly. You know what the Reichstag has brought you to."

The German people's government has no choice but to view in this call to the population to form a certain government an attempt to interfere in Germany's internal situation, which under the given conditions can only cause heavy damage to the German people. The German government is prepared to live in peace and good relations with all states, the Russian one too. But it must demand that the right of the German people to its own determination of its internal affairs is respected and that there be no interferences in these from outside. Apart from this, the above incitement to forming a government on another foundation and with other goals than those of the German people's government does not indicate what stance the Russian Soviet government adopts towards the current German government. If the Soviet government wishes to sustain normal relations with it, the German government must insist that the Russian government recognises it and does not foster the formation of a different government.[2]

With respect to this, the German people's government, in agreement with the Executive Council of German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, has resolved to request the following from the Russian government before mutual diplomatic representations can be restored:

1. A clear recognition of the current German people's government and the obligation to refrain from influencing the German population to form a different government in any way.
2. A clarification of the events that took place during the deposition of the German general consulates.

> Regarding point 1, the German government may look forward to an appropriate statement. For carrying out the request in point 2, it expects that the German general consulates will now be able to finally leave Russia and head to Germany unhindered, and further asks that one member of each of the German workers' and soldiers' councils from Russia and Petersburg be allowed to travel to Germany, so that they may give information here about the details of how their organisation was created, and can deliberate on all other questions concerning their stance and competencies.

With respect to this, it should be remarked that the Bolshevist government had one day suddenly withdrawn the permits of the general consuls in Moscow and Petersburg under the pretext that German workers' and soldiers' councils there had resolved to depose it. Surely a bit rich, especially since there was no doubt that, as the telegram goes on to say, the relevant resolutions had come about at the prompting and with the support of the Russian authorities.

2. The second statement is the following telegram, dispatched to Moscow on 17 January 1919 by the government, which was now composed solely of Majority socialists, after the end of the *Spartakus* uprising described in the previous chapter:

> During the suppression of the seditious movement that was recently undertaken here by a terrorist group for the purpose of political and actual violation of the German people, irrefutable proofs came to light that this movement was supported by Russian official means and by Russian organs, and that Russian official personalities participated in it. The German government lodges the most stringent protest against this impermissible criminal interference in Germany's internal situation. It initially refrains from withdrawing the rights to hospitality granted to all Russian citizens who were hitherto able to freely reside in Germany for this reason, though as such it would be justified in doing so. However, it does not want any doubt to remain that it will proceed in the most severe way against all Russians who have been guilty of supporting this seditious movement or still become active in this vein.
>
> (signed) Ebert (signed) Scheidemann.

This heralded a relationship that, however restrained the Republic's demeanour might be, could degenerate into explicit enmity at any moment.

Uncertain too was the relationship towards the emerging Czechoslovak state, which occupied the greatest part of the territory bordering Germany to the South. Except for German Austria, which was incapable of providing aid to it, the Republic of Germany saw no friends on its borders, and even Denmark, which bordered it to the North, maintained strict neutrality, but had in North Schleswig a question to be settled with Germany that could under some circumstances could make its relations to it very tense.

In view of this, despite the peaceable intentions of the Republic, its foreign policy situation still left very much to be desired.

The Bourgeois Parties and the Republic

In all the time addressed here, none of the bourgeois parties dared to hoist openly and unreservedly the banner of the overthrown *Kaiserreich*, and none found it advisable to take up a hostile position towards the Republic. Even the criticism that its press levelled at the government's measures came off tamely enough overall. They were too conscious of the need to have a well-ordered government at all to feel the desire to make life difficult for the government that they acknowledged was the only one that was possible for the moment. If the Communists reproached the government of the *Volksbeauftragte* that they were protecting the capitalists, then a piece of truth did lie in this. Only it was not a justified reproach whatsoever from the standpoint of any sensibly construed socialism. One could not keep the national economy going—which the working class was after all thoroughly interested in—without at least initially guaranteeing capital security against arbitrary infringements as well.

But if the bourgeois parties and the classes and *strata* that stood behind them appreciated the need to resign themselves to the transformation of Germany and the German states into republics, they were self-evidently for that reason not already willing to give up representing their particular political conceptions and economic interests. However, they grasped that, in order to do so, they had to adapt to the new political order of things, which was not feasible without changing their old firms and programmes. And naturally this requirement was all the stronger the further right the parties stood. So while the two social-democratic parties retained their names unchanged and only advanced their programmes of action without changing anything fundamental about them, the Progressive People's Partyists, *Zentrum*, the National-Liberals, the

Conservatives, and the intermediate political formations of these parties had to more or less fundamentally revise their programmes. After a period of gestation, which found its reflection in deliberations within the daily press and discussions at meetings of various kinds and sizes, a number of new political associations emerged that eventually grouped themselves into four large political parties with new names and new programmes, with a view to the elections for the *Nationalversammlung*. Since most of the new political formations that initially emerged were flashes in the pan, it is not necessary to go into them here. The large political parties that finally emerged from this gestation process were:

1. The *German-Democratic Party* (DDP). A unification of almost the entire former Progressive People's Party with some of the members of the old National-Liberal Party and adherents of smaller, mostly bourgeois-democratic regional or *Land* groupings. This party placed itself both in the first appeal of its founding committee as well as in its election appeal, published at the start of December 1918, straightforwardly on the side of the Republic. In the founding appeal it says about this:

> The first fundamental principle asserts that we place ourselves on the side of the republican state form, represent it in the elections, and want to defend the new state against all reaction, but that a *Nationalversammlung* elected under all necessary guarantees must make the decision about the constitution.

And in the election appeal:

> In the elections, we stand up for the creation of a German Republic, in which all public power solely rests on the will of the sovereign people. We demand the full equality of all citizens, male and female, before the law and in administration, without respect for estate [*Stand*], class, or confession, and demand the freedom of conscience and of practising religion.

Further, the programme demands, in order to secure "an existence worth living [*lebenswertes Dasein*] for fair work and a part in cultural goods [*Güter der Kultur*]":

> State recognition of the workers' and employees' associations, obligatory arbitration as well as guarantee of the working conditions settled through

> wage agreements, in particular also of the agreed minimum wages and minimum salaries,

and further:

> a truly social fiscal policy! A one-time progressive wealth levy, spread over an appropriate period of time. A scaled income tax with as much exemption as possible for families with many children, income from work, and small wealth. General inheritance tax for every larger bequest. But above all the most exacting acquisition of war profits. No German can have enriched himself from this war.

But the bourgeois character of the party is expressed in this passage:

> Such burdens can only be borne while maintaining private property and an economic order that keeps alive the interest of the individual in acquiring earnings and spurs him on to the highest activity. The outrageous indebtedness, the lack of raw materials, and the destruction of our foreign trade threaten us with an unparalleled economic crisis. Only the joint exertion of all forces of business-owners and workers, of those with independent means and the employed, can prevent this collapse. For that reason we reject the transfer, aspired to by Social Democracy, of all means of production into the possession of society. The example of the wartime societies terrifies us! The question of socialisation is to be decided purely factually for each individual case according to whether an increase in the possible earnings of the broad masses and a rise in productivity can be achieved. On no account may there be state interventions in the form of the bureaucratisation of economic life.

If one can perhaps comprehend this confession of faith by a bourgeois party to a substantially private-capitalist economic order, then in the part of the programme that deals with foreign policy, we come upon language that was barely suited to persuading our foreign enemies that the spirit of the old system had already been extirpated root and branch. There it says, among other things:

> The world shall know that the strength of the German nation cannot be broken forever in future. We want the representatives of the German people to go proudly and upright to the peace conference. We want them to speak in a way that befits the delegates of a people, defeated by tremendous superior force, that is today free and independent.

"*Proudly* and upright", that allows for a very troubling interpretation. For the dignity in demeanour that befitted the representatives of the Republic, one could choose expressions that could be alluded to less well than these in the spirit of the old national liberalism, and were also interpreted that way.

2. The *German People's Party* (DVP). The continuation of the National-Liberal Party in a somewhat new garb. It was constituted when it became clear that a complete fusion of all the elements of the National-Liberal Party with the Progressive People's Party was not to be achieved, and encompasses the right wing of the old party with some elements from the centre and adherents of smaller nationalistically-minded associations. In its programme, drawn up on 15 December 1918 in Berlin, the new party commits to the "democratic, general, equal, and secret franchise for both sexes", but deliberately avoids the word "republic". It only recognises the new government conditionally. In dry words it declares:

> We demand of the present government that it finally energetically provide for calm and order. We are prepared to collaborate with them to this end under the current form of government, and to support all endeavours aimed towards this goal of the government in post. But we demand an end to interventions by unprofessional persons in the activity of courts, authorities, and communal administrations, in the freedom of association and of the press. We demand an end to the mismanagement and boundless squandering of public assets and public moneys. We demand an end to irresponsible interventions in economic life, which threaten us with famine, anarchy, and state bankruptcy.

In the economic- and financial-policy part of the programme, the capitalist standpoint, and in the part that deals with foreign policy, the nationalist standpoint is expressed far more strongly than in the Democrats' programme. Thus, it reads in the latter regard:

> The more heavily Germany suffers under the devastating consequences of losing the war, the more consciously we place our entire policy under the national idea, the more firmly we reject all those international endeavours that blur and obscure our people's uniqueness. The unity of the Reich is only the foundation of our political activity, within Reich unity cultural group peculiarity [*Stammesart*] shall be able to unfold itself freely, rejecting

> both centralising paternalism as well as particularistic exceptional aspirations [*Sonderbestrebungen*].

Even in the programme of the new party of the conservative groups, the nationalist tendency is not emphasised any more keenly.

3. The *German-National People's Party* (DNVP). The coalition of the old German-Conservative Party with various interest associations of agriculturalists and manufacturers, the remainders of the erstwhile Free-Conservative Party and the Anti-Semites. To secure itself a larger following in the new conditions, the leaders of the former German-Conservative Party subjected their political demands to such a radical revision in the days of the Revolution that the programme of the new party, published on 24 November 1918, seems almost democratic-liberal.

With resignation, it says at the start after a short introduction:

> Much that is sacred and dear to us is destroyed. And yet we may not idly mourn what has been lost. It is each man's duty to collaborate in rebuilding the German state and people, and to give the new Germany a new shape and a new lively substance.

And in the following passage, the party renounces the monarchy. There it says:

> We are ready and determined to contribute on the side of every state form in which law and order rule. We repudiate every dictatorship by a single population class. Only a well-ordered state system brings us bread and peace.

Likewise, the old authoritarian state [*Obrigkeitsstaat*] is fundamentally abandoned. The next passage reads:

> State and law, armed with strong authority, borne by the *free will of the people*, must bring their protective influence to bear on popular and economic life, in order to foster national culture and social welfare.

Then the demand is made that "man as an ethical personality" should lie more than hitherto at the centre of public life. The conservative

meaning of this demand becomes visible through the following sentence: "A lively Christendom, marriage, and family shall be the strong bearers of public life". But the next sentence proclaims the party's nationalist tendencies: "German nature [*Wesen*] and the German way [*Art*] must pervade our entire nationhood [*Volkstum*] more than ever". The first sentence in the guidelines of the party's programme expresses this more decidedly still:

> We champion a strong German nationhood that is determined to uphold its unity, freedom, and autonomy against external might, and keeps itself independent of foreign influences.

The second sentence of these guidelines recognises the "*parliamentary form of government*, *which alone is possible* after recent events". The third sentence, in conformity with all other bourgeois programmes, demands the protection of private property "in the face of the planned infringements by Social Democracy", and the fourth proclaims "adherence to the fundamental principle of the private economy", at the same time as the ready willingness to "foster this through the public form of enterprise [*gemeinwirtschaftliche Betriebsform*] in the cooperative, society, state, and community".

Just as in this latter point, the guidelines about social policy, settlement policy, fiscal policy, combating need for housing, admission to careers as officials, school policy, and the equality of women differ only slightly in appearance from the relevant passages in the Democrats' programme. One might think that one had been presented with the programme of a liberal party. Only a closer examination reveals that here repeatedly sentences are lacking in the binding form that permits no weakening in their applications, and later experience has also shown that very great differences obtain between the fundamental principles in this party's programme, formulated at that time, and its stance in practice. All the same, it remains noteworthy how much the insurrection of the working class in November 1918 drummed social insight into the party of the Junkers and its followers, and awakened their sense of obligation [*Schuldbewusstsein*].

4. The *Christian-Democratic People's Party*. The old *Zentrum*, which also soon took up this name again and placed it in the foreground. Almost more sharply than the other bourgeois parties, it emphasised

its opposition to Social Democracy in its first appeals after the Revolution. This was caused especially by the fact that the sworn enemy of the Church, Adolf Hoffmann, who at the time belonged to Independent Social Democracy, had attained the leadership of the Culture and Education Ministry in Prussia, and immediately set about putting an end to any involvement of Church communities in schooling and abolishing the confessional schools. By contrast, in the purely political domain, *Zentrum* placed itself as a Christian people's party almost more resolutely than the German-Democratic Party on the side of the Republic. Its political election appeal for the *Nationalversammlung* starts with this passage:

> World war and Revolution have broken the old Germany to pieces. A new one is being born in storm and stress [*Sturm und Drang*]. It is to become a free social people's state [*Volksstaat*], in which all German tribes, all classes and estates, all citizens without difference of faith and party affiliation can feel well. Creating this new Germany is the task of the entire people, not a party dictatorship. All parties want to and must be part of it. But for that, the old parties require an inward and outward renewal.
>
> A new *Zentrum* will and must emerge in these changing days. Unreserved commitment to the democratic people's state, fighting against class rule in any form, order in freedom, open renunciation of the mammonism and materialism of our days, cultivation of the ideal values that alone can heal people and state—these are the fundamental principles of its renewal as a Christian-democratic people's party!

In the guiding principles for the party's foreign policy, it demands regarding the international stance of the Church:

> Complete independence of the Holy See, ensured by guarantees under the law of peoples.

An interesting affirmation of the Papacy's abandonment of the restoration of the States of the Church, which abandonment has given the entire policy of Rome a new direction, and has greatly raised its influence as an intellectual force.

Of the guiding principles regarding the constitution, the following should be mentioned:

An independent people's government [*Volksregierung*], resting on the confidence of the people's parliament [*Volksvertretung*], with strong executive force at the head of the Reich and in the federal states.

Creation of the constitution through the *Nationalversammlung*.

Equal right of all popular *strata* to participate in the administration of all affairs without the spirit of caste [*Kastengeist*] and class preferral [*Klassenbevorzugung*].

The scope and the boundaries of Catholic social policy are indicated by the first two guiding principles of the section "Economic and social policy". They read:

1. Construction and regulation of the national economy on productive work in the service of the common good with the fundamental preservation of private property also in the means of production, maintenance of our capacity for competitiveness in the world market. Replacement of private-capitalist monopolies by ordered public enterprise. Creation and preservation of a strong peasantry and fostering our agricultural domestic production [*Eigenproduktion*] to secure our people's sustenance. Regulation and control of the commodity market of mass consumer goods according to sound economic principles while taking into consideration the spending capacity of the population.
2. Protection and fostering of all employment categories [*Erwerbsstände*] as necessary parts of a healthy economic body. Decisively favouring the common good before all professional and estate interests. Continuation of social policy for the urban and rural population. Fiercely combatting profiteering of any kind. Preserving and strengthening a vital manufacturing estate. Protecting the justified interests of the merchantry.

* * *

These extracts will suffice to illustrate the spirit of the programmes with which the bourgeois parties now entered the election campaign for the *Nationalversammlung*. All of them had their reservations about the programmatic announcement with which the Republic had come into being, but none of them refused to take the side of the Republic, none even hinted at the wish to see the *Kaiserreich* restored. Which, however, does

not mean that such a wish did not have its supporters. Only that they did not dare to make themselves known as a party.

Notes

1. The policy of *Hakatismus*, initiated especially after 1894, was a conscious effort to Germanise the Polish population of eastern Germany by systematically suppressing their cultural autonomy.
2. [Ed. B.—The cited radio message had been transmitted on 11 November 1918.]

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CHAPTER 17

The *Nationalversammlung* Elections, Conclusion of the First Stage of the Revolution

On 30 November, the *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* had proclaimed a voting law by ordinance for the Republic that made the fundamental principles laid down in its first appeal to the German people a reality.

Supplemented by ordinances on 6, 19, and 28 December, it gave all Germans who had completed their twentieth year the franchise, without differences of sex and without any residence census, and established proportional election as the way that deputies would be determined. For this purpose, after the ceding of Alsace-Lorraine, Germany was divided into 37 electoral districts, which had to elect 421 deputies on the basis of election lists, and it was decided that there would be one deputy for every 150,000 inhabitants. The voting law also permitted parties or others submitting electoral lists to give a declaration by which they could register their lists as joint with that of another party or group in each district, so that the excess votes for both of them would be counted together, and as the case might be secure them one more deputy.

The election campaign itself went smoothly in general. It lies in the nature of the proportional electoral system, and it is one of its advantages, that under it, elections overwhelmingly have a sober character. In the relatively narrow space of a constituency that only has to elect one deputy, people's spirits collide with one another much more passionately than in an extended district that has to cover a number of deputies, and where it is not a question of which *party* wins the seat, but about *how many* seats

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each party receives. No noteworthy attempts to disrupt the act of voting could be recorded.

Participation in the vote was very lively. Of 35 million Germans in total who were entitled to vote, about 30½ million cast their votes. With the exception of the districts of Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia, for which conclusive figures for the distribution of voters according to sex were not yet available when the Reich statistics were drawn up, out of overall around 15 million male electors 12.4 million, and out of 17.7 million female electors 14.6 million took part in the election, 82.4% of male and 82.3% of female voters. The participation of the female sex thus only lagged very slightly behind that of the male. How the votes of both sexes are divided across the different parties is impossible to establish overall, since almost everywhere the voting slips of both were placed in the same urns and were counted mixed together as a result. Only in a few districts were separate urns set up for female voters, and there it turned out that the women cast comparatively more votes for the parties of the right and centre than the men, so that the female franchise had a more conservative effect. Across the whole of Germany, the parties received the following votes (approximately) and seats:

German-National People's Party (DNVP)	3,121,000	42
German People's Party (DVP)	1,346,000	21
Parties monarchist in character	**4,467,000**	**63**
Christian People's Party (*Zentrum*)	5,980,000	88
German-Democratic Party (DDP)	5,642,000	75
Bourgeois-republican parties	**11,622,000**	**163**
Majority Social Democrats (SPD)	11,510,000	163
Independent Social Democrats (USPD)	2,317,000	22
Socialist parties	**13,827,000**	**185**
Smaller groups (4 Welfs, 4 Farmers' League, 1 Braunschweig Land Association, 1 Land Workers' Party)	485,000	10
Total	**30,401,000**	**421**

Accordingly, the social democrats in the *Nationalversammlung* only controlled a minority of the seats, even though they were by far the strongest party. It is without doubt that the election result would have been substantially more favourable for them if the elections had taken place at a time where the enthusiasm of the great mass of the people about the overthrow that had been accomplished had not yet been weak-

ened by the fractiousness among the socialists and the uprisings with the suppression measures they made necessary. Social Democracy lost some seats because the Independent socialists had rejected the offer by the Majority socialists to combine their lists for the purpose of making excess votes count, except for in 6 electoral districts. They themselves certainly suffered the main damage from this. Not strong enough in by far the greater number of districts to produce the necessary votes for a single deputy, so that their voters there remained unrepresented in the *Nationalversammlung*, they had, despite being almost a million votes stronger than the German People's Party, only one more deputy than it. The flaw in the electoral system which this illustrated was later redressed by the *Nationalversammlung* through changes that ensured an unsurpassably accurate representation of the parties according to their strength among the voters.

The elections for the *Nationalversammlung* had been preceded by elections in 6 individual states for their *Land* parliaments, of them 2 (Anhalt and Braunschweig) already in December 1918, the other 4 (Baden, Bavaria, Württemberg, Mecklenburg-Strelitz) in the first half of January 1919. The first two produced absolute social-democratic majorities, in the other four more bourgeois than social-democratic votes were cast. Only in Braunschweig did the Independents receive nearly as many votes as the Majority socialists, namely 51,668 to 59,708, in the other states they lagged far behind them. So in Bavaria, even though Kurt Eisner, who had been named President, belonged to Independent Social Democracy, only 3 Independents were elected against 62 Majority social democrats. In Württemberg the relative numbers were 4 Independents and 52 Majorityists, and in Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the Independent social democrats had no representatives at all.

In the elections for the *Nationalversammlung* too, the Independents fell behind the Majorityists in all but two districts (Leipzig and Düsseldorf). Yet these districts were very large, and encompassed several places where the relationship was the other way around. In Berlin, the Majorityists received 405,000, the Independents 307,000, in the two districts Potsdam 1—9 and Potsdam 10, which contain the suburbs of Berlin, the Majorityists gained 681,000 votes, the Independents only 267,000.

The oppositions and hostilities that divided the Majority socialists from the Independent socialists had burgeoned through the January battles to such an intensity that a unification of the two parties in the *Nationalversammlung* had become extremely improbable, if not impossi-

ble. With that too, the idea that popped up here and there of a government made up of the allied social democrats and the more radical elements of *Zentrum* and the Democrats had lost the possibility of being realised. Majority Social Democracy could not countenance forming a purely social-democratic minority government, after it had placed itself fundamentally on the side of democratic parliamentarism. Hence, for the work that the *Nationalversammlung* had to perform, only a coalition government made up of Majority social democrats and bourgeois-republican parties was possible.

With that it was already indicated that the main task that had to be accomplished, the constitutional law of the Republic, would likewise be a work of compromise, and that Social Democracy would have to make many sacrifices for it.

As deplorable as these and other consequences of the failure of the emergence of a social-democratic majority were, viewed from the partisan standpoint of Social Democracy, one may still not forget the following when assessing its import for the development and consolidation of the Republic.

Germany's economic situation and social composition made its immediate transformation into a fully socialist community impossible. Quite apart from its powerful peasantry, with which the Republic could change course at whim even less than the Bolshevists could with the Russian *muzhiks*, there were further millions of bourgeois tradesmen, which it could likewise not do without. Even in normal conditions, in light of this state of affairs, the exclusion of the entire bourgeoisie from participating in the government would have been a mistake that would soon have wreaked its bitter revenge. Before long, it would have become clear, as Lassalle's explanation in his brilliant speech about constitutional matters signifies, that societal classes that are indispensable or not to be removed are "also a part of the constitution". All the more did this apply in the frightful economic conditions that the *Kaiserreich* had left the Republic as a result of its despicable *Machtpolitik* and obsession with prestige. The Republic could well take up the struggle with *certain* bourgeois parties and classes, but not with *all* of them, without putting itself into an unsustainable position. It could only bear the great burden that had fallen to it if it interested significant parts of the bourgeoisie in its continued existence and its fruitful development. Even if Social Democracy had attained a numerical majority in the elections for the *Nationalversammlung*, the inclusion of bourgeois-republican parties in the government would have

been a requirement for the self-preservation of the Republic. But at the same time, this was also a vital necessity for Germany as a nation.

So the outcome of the elections for the *Nationalversammlung* put its mark on a political necessity founded in the social constitution of Germany, and with that recognisably finished off the first stage of the German Revolution.

PART II

How a Revolution Perished

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CHAPTER 18

History and Legend

A Preface

Leibniz formulated the proposition, which has remained unrefuted, that no two constituent parts of the organic world are completely the same as each other. That applies already to the tiniest living creatures, and thus so much more to organisms as immensely complex as human beings. And just as no two individuals of the human species are fully alike, so all the more it cannot happen that two peoples are in all respects the same, and that their life plays out in consistent agreement about everything. Even with the development of peoples that are similar in form, there is a whole host of differences between them as regards personalities and facts, which make a completely similar course of events extremely improbable. Can one conclude from that, as some think ingenious today, that history is there for nothing to be learned from it? That would amount to the wise insight that, faced with differences between individuals in eye and hair colour, muscular strength and body length, medical science is impossible. Like the life of individuals, the life of peoples also plays out according to the same laws of development, so that we can recognise very well from the examples of the past what kinds of effects certain causes will probably have here as well.

* * *

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During the 1890s, I had to look through the work *The History of the French Revolution of 1848* by the talented Swiss socialist Louis Héritier for the publisher Dietz.[1] It gave me an occasion to preoccupy myself somewhat more closely with the history of this revolution, which I had hitherto only known very superficially.[2] Héritier's book is a very diligent work, still worth reading today. Lavishly decorated by the publisher, it is written in an extraordinarily lively way and offers far more in its contents than the title lets one suspect. Among other things, it provides a vivid description of the government of Louis Philippe's bourgeois monarchy, and in this an entire précis of the so very gripping history of French socialism in the first half of the nineteenth century. But it was not without quite serious mistakes. Héritier, who sadly died young, an enthusiastic Frenchman like so many radical West Swiss, clove as a socialist to the French Marxists, but his knowledge of Marxist doctrine and especially of the Marxist theory of history was not deep enough to allow him to offer a fully critical judgment of precisely those of the February Revolution's events whose correct assessment was what by now concerned the socialist readership of Germany. In his depiction of these events—the class struggles in the February Revolution—he followed in the main the conventions of the French Social-Revolutionaries, and believed he had sufficiently fulfilled the task that lay on the Marxist historian if at suitable points in this traditional depiction he appended the critical remarks that Marx had dedicated to the same events in his brilliant piece *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

But the more I now concerned myself with studying the February Revolution, the more conscious I became that the clashes that had determined the course of its development concerned the consequences of problems of an economic nature and of the influences of insufficiently well-founded ideologies that would likely threaten the fruitful course of any future revolution to an even higher degree. In his essays about the events in France from February 1848 until Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état*, Marx contented himself with tersely identifying those problems and with more casual critique of ideologies, but eschewed any searching illumination of the events that included a critique of the behaviour of the Social-Revolutionaries. This was partly for reasons of good tact, since his critique would have had to touch persons that languished in prison as victims of the victorious reaction or who had suffered banishment, but partly because at that time, his conception of the timescale of development was itself still one to which this critique seemed fairly superfluous. As a result of this, his

remarks left untouched a great part of what one can call the legend of the February Revolution, and this legend has permeated the entire literature after Marx, to the great detriment of an ever more necessary recognition of the true historical character of the struggles in question, and their political significance.

Now since Héritier's book was in the first instance written for German workers, it seemed necessary to me, wherever the legend was at risk of misleading the judgment of readers, to attach the historical truth in certain places as addendums, either through notes or appendices, as it appeared to me from having studied the events in question. Here it is above all a matter of judging actions that were proclaimed by the extreme factions of the French socialism of the epoch, the Blanquists—then called Babouvists—and their kindred spirit elements, and which the more reformistically-oriented socialists either openly opposed or did not participate in. Above all, the events of 16 April 1848 came into question here, where the Blanquists attempted to transform a demonstration—organised as a joint rally of the socialist workers of Paris—behind the organisers' backs into an action to forcibly "cleanse" the provisional government of its bourgeois members, which led the majority of the non-Blanquist socialists to join the National Guard that was called up against the Blanquists by the provisional government. Likewise the insane interlude of 15 May 1848, when under the influence of agitators from the Social-Revolutionary club, a demonstration in favour of the restoration of Poland led to an invasion by excited masses into the National Assembly—where demonstrators dispersed the Assembly, declared it dissolved, and proclaimed a new government led by people of their own colours, the culmination of which was the arrest of this new government and the main leaders of the Blanquists, including Blanqui himself. And finally also the workers' insurrection of 22 June 1848, which ended in the complete defeat of the workers after a three-day bloody battle at the barricades, and which was followed by gruesome acts of revenge against them—but at the same time, as a result of these vengeful acts, intensified the class contradiction between bourgeoisie and socialist workers so far that the monarchist reaction gained ever more ground, and eventually made possible the *coup d'état* of 2 December 1851 that put an end to the Republic.

Apart from those notes, I wrote a postscript to Héritier's work, which bears the title "From the Second Empire to the Third Republic", in which I tried to address the phases of development in the history of the French Second Empire, its rise and decline, causally from a socialist standpoint.

This began with a section in which I portrayed synoptically the causes of the Second Republic's failure in a few short chapters, and reckoned somewhat more harshly with the legend than I did in those notes and appendices. I believe that now is the time for me to publish this section in a special printing, which I have given the title: "Why the Second Republic Perished".

I am prompted to do so by the fact that—despite the prodigious historical differences between the Germany of our times and the France of the middle of the nineteenth century, and despite the very great differences in their economic structure, their class composition, and their class organisation—the course of the French February Revolution of 1848 and the trajectory of the German Revolution of 1918 up to now present parallels that provide material for fruitful reflection. It is surprising how certain slogans here wield almost the same disastrous effect, certain scenarios repeat themselves with only slight differences, certain problems place themselves in the way of the development of the Republic, different only in respect of the relative size of the issue they refer to but almost the same in nature, and the same differences in temperament and passions within the parties provoke the same contradictions, the same divisions. Often, the similarity is so great that one can match up certain personalities who had disastrous effects in the February Revolution without hesitation with personalities from our Revolution, equivalent in their nature and their effects. The fact is namely that the February Revolution of 1848 heralded the emergence of a type of revolution that differs from the great political revolutions of earlier generations in one significant respect, and distinguished itself precisely through this difference as the prototype of the political revolution that is now to be expected in advanced countries.

I referred to this in my work *The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*, the work that earned me the name of the intellectual foster-father of revisionism in Social Democracy.[3] In how far this title befits me can remain undiscussed here, since the concept of revisionism has now been interpreted in very different ways. What is correct is only that this work sought to provide the theoretical justification for the necessity and possibility of a fundamentally reformist policy in Social Democracy, and identify the fundamental principles of this policy in general outline. In this respect, it was the outcome of my study of the history of the February Revolution of 1848. This study made the very deepest impression on me. It made clear to me what kinds of problems Social Democracy would confront in a political revolution in developed Germany, and made it appear imperative to me to labour in writing to ensure that, just as with the legend

itself, a complete break was made with the slogans and arguments principally derived from it. Some of those who did not understand me at the time will now at least grasp, where we see the problems of the political revolutions of the twentieth century before us in reality, why I laid such great store by a thorough discussion of these problems. But I hope that the partial illumination of the February Revolution which is presented in the following piece, and the subsequent Users' Guide, will not have been written quite in vain for practical politics as well.

Notes

1. Louis Héritier (1862–1898), Swiss anarcho-syndicalist activist and writer, engaged especially in socialist circles and the workers' secretariat in Geneva, corresponded periodically with Marx and Engels.
2. The 1848 French Revolution, also known as the February Revolution, was among the more prominent events of the 1848–49 wave of revolutions across Europe. It broke out as a result of dissatisfaction with the so-called July Monarchy of Louis Philippe (1830–48), and resulted in the installation of a new, more democratic regime system, the French Second Republic. Between February and December 1848, France was ruled by a shifting series of unstable governments, elected on the basis of universal male suffrage, which initially introduced radical policies to help labour organisation, such as the 'right to work' (*droit au travail*) and 'National Workshops' for the unemployed. Yet, buckling under intense economic pressure due to capital flight and France's worsening credit on the nascent international financial markets, the Second Republic's government became increasingly reliant on conservative policies and the support of the French military. One of the flashpoints was the bloody violence of the failed June Days uprising by Parisian workers, which came about as a result of latent tensions between liberal Orléanists, radical republicans, and socialists, and which was brutally quashed by the armed forces of the provisional government. Ultimately, the uprising only strengthened the hand of reactionary parties, and laid the foundations for the election to the Presidency of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte in December 1848. Exactly three years later, in December 1851, Bonaparte suspended the Republic's elected National Assembly and established the Second French Empire under his rule as Napoléon III, which lasted until France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71.
3. Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, Henry Tudor (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1899]); Henry Tudor and J.M. Tudor (eds.), *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896–1898* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

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CHAPTER 19

Why the Second French Republic Perished

From the history of the French Revolution of 1848. (Written 1896.[1])

The Historical Significance of the February Revolution

The French Revolution of 1848 played out in the form of a series of reactions after a sudden upsurge, and its history is the history of continued bitter disappointments after a great rush of joy. The contradiction between the highly-strung expectations which the February Revolution awakened and the seemingly meagre positive results it left behind, between the brilliant victory, won after three days of brave struggle at the barricades, and the infamous defeat that unfolded gradually over three years, gives the history of the Second French Republic a tragicomic character. After all, there was also no shortage of mockery about it. Born in intoxicated ecstasy, dead of chronic crapulence, that is, seen outwardly, the course of its life.

But despite this, it remains a momentous piece of history, whose study is still of great value today—and perhaps especially today. As great as the impetus is that the Paris Commune of 1871 has given the modern workers' movement, it cannot be compared in immediacy, vehemence, and many-sidedness with the jolt that Europe received from the February Revolution of 1848. What gives the Paris Commune its historical significance is that it is the first revolutionary uprising of modern times on which

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the working class has made its mark. In it, the workers of Paris take on the leading role, and retain it until the end. Insofar, the Commune remains an eternally memorable event. But apart from that, if we examine it in its immediate scope, it was a local phenomenon both in its geographic aspect and as far as its intellectual colouring is concerned. As an uprising, it was substantially restricted to Paris, and Paris's struggle for its rights or claims as a capital city dominates the course of its life. All other expressions of life [*Lebensäußerungen*], even the decrees of its Work Commission, play only a secondary part. In the first instance, it was not about certain *general* ideas, but about Paris's right to emphatically assert *its* insight and its *illusions* vis-à-vis the rest of France. It is more by accident that the ideas of Paris in 1871, besides some vestiges from the first French Revolution that have become irrelevant, incorporated the ambitions of the modern workers' movement. Judged according to its main driving force, the Commune uprising can only be regarded as one episode in the history of the nineteenth century.

It is different with the February Revolution of 1848. Even if it was also fought out on the barricades of Paris, it still bears from the beginning the character of a national movement, and becomes the impetus for similar popular movements in the greater part of the rest of Europe. Four weeks after the victory of the Parisians, the physiognomy of all of Europe had changed: the Spring of Nations seemed to have sprung. And however quickly reaction set in, however soon the powers that had seemingly been dashed to the ground recovered again, they could only restore a part of what was destroyed in February and March, and only unmake a part of what was achieved in those months. The February Revolution left behind more than mere ideological impressions, but placed the entire public life of Central Europe on a new foundation, it shattered thrones that would never rise again, and it helped fundamental political principles prevail that have never again been taken away. In Prussia and Austria, a number of feudal rights were abolished, and the foundations were laid for constitutional government, and in France the general franchise was declared, with whose introduction, as Lassalle put it, the dawn of a new historical epoch draws near.[2] Indeed, 24 February 1848 heralds the era of European democracy.

The sky glowed rosy in the light of the flames to which the July throne fell prey. Even though the Republic was only won by the radical part of Paris's population, it was still greeted with joy by an infinitely greater fraction of the nation. They were tired of the rule by census voters, they

believed that with the arrival of the people onto the political stage had come the end of the corruption which had settled in under the bourgeois monarchy in all areas of public life.[3] The foundation wall of political privilege was torn down, instead of the 300,000 census voters, 9 million adult Frenchmen, the entire people without regard for differences in wealth and life situation, should now determine the direction and the character of legislation. The entire nation, all the forces lying in its lap were summoned to ascend into the public arena and through their activity, through strong assertion of their wishes and ambitions open up new paths for societal development, to work at the task of a social rebirth. The first decrees of the victorious February Revolution did not even need to smuggle in the right to work to lend it the character of a social revolution. With the new freedoms of the press and assembly, and the declaration of the general franchise, the social emancipation of the proletariat was already pronounced in principle. It now only depended on its own capacity to make effective use of the available means, how far and in what time what was given in principle would actually be realised.

The Paris Commune of 1871 had to defend itself against an external enemy who mustered troops before the gates of the city in order to put an end to it in the shortest possible time. The Prussians as potential enemies on the one flank, and Versailles as an actual enemy on the other, it had to think in the first instance of its military defence. Every other measure had to be subordinated to this purpose, so that there could be no question of a natural internal development of the Commune. It was a development in a straitjacket, and all the more so the more we forge ahead in the history of the Commune. On the other hand, none of its socialist measures had to pass a trial by fire. Hence the lesson that is to be drawn from the history of the Commune is only usable for similar cases, which do not exactly belong to the likeliest possibilities of imminent development. It is different with the February Revolution. Accepted by the entire nation, it could pursue its natural path of development all the more as France's neighbouring states were utterly preoccupied with themselves. More favourable external conditions than those it was granted were hardly imaginable. No attack by the Eastern powers, no Pitt Alliance was to be feared, no prohibition on communication abroad, no compulsion to defer to foreign countries inhibited its free determination. Insofar, the course of the February Revolution was a thoroughly natural one, which could play out in *freedom*.

It is this that makes its history so exceedingly instructive. If the future should still bring revolutionary uprisings of an explosive character, one

may presume that two things are certain given the state of Europe's social development today: they will firstly take place at least at the national stage, and they will secondly be international at least so far that no government will find it compatible with its safety to interfere in favour of counterrevolution in the relevant country without very foolish provocation. A victorious popular uprising would thereby gain sufficient leeway, as things may be, to take full advantage of its victory in light of the possibilities it finds available, or itself take power in hand through a raft of mistakes by counterrevolution in its own country.

Did the February Revolution in France accomplish what it was possible to accomplish as things stood? The view of history that recognises a certain lawlike conformity in development suggests that we answer this question with a yes. One objects to putting anything more than insignificant side issues in the category of what is not necessary. However, even if it is right that limits are placed on subjective will—whether of individuals or parties—through social ties, its sphere of action [*Machtsphäre*] is still far greater than is commonly assumed. Whether a Cromwell or a Lord Essex stands at the head of its army can give the revolution a very different outcome. Whether the leaders of the revolutionary Parisian people are verbose fantasists [*phrasenreiche Phantasten*] or far-sighted politicians can make the June Days battle [*Junischlacht*] necessary or never take place. Nobody will want to claim that the battle of the June Days of 1848 was a historical necessity, any more than it can be claimed that in 1848 the victory of revolutionary socialism was possible. In their political activities, men come up against conditions which they cannot straightforwardly ignore, but all the same they still, as Marx says, make their own history. If that was not the case, then all historical study would have no value except as a chronicle, and all social research would be idle gimmickry [*müßige Spielerei*].

A victory for revolutionary socialism was impossible in France in 1848. Those who did not want to accept that had to be defeated, just as the Chartists were defeated in England, even though as a country it was far more advanced. But the defeat of the bourgeois Republic, its strangulation by Louis Bonaparte, was not so desperately necessary. For this, and especially for the way in which it took place, the mistakes of some and the skilful intrigues of others carry a share of responsibility.

Karl Marx analysed the course of the February Revolution's development so masterfully in two essays that it seems almost superfluous to address the subject for socialists yet again. But however deep the explanations, however significant the pointers that *The Class Struggles in France*

from 1848 to 1851 and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* offer might be, they still do not make redundant a more detailed history of the February Revolution. Both works are casual writings [*Gelegenheitsschriften*], written for people who also experienced the time they deal with, and who in part themselves had lived through the events they deal with as well, who still held the facts whose critique it deals with vividly in mind. They recapitulate the facts, but they do not narrate them, they form their critique, but not their objective representation; an analytical commentary about them, but not their graphic portrayal. And however highly Marx elevates himself above the conventional party author, he still writes his critique thoroughly from the standpoint of a fighting partisan, specifically of a fighter in whom still trembles an unmitigated agitation about the events he is critiquing, who was opposed to the persons he was dealing with, and who still struggled against them in exile. Under these circumstances, to demand of Marx the objectivity of a personally detached historian, to whom both the defender and the opponent of his own standpoint are equivalent figures, means placing a demand on him that he neither could nor wished to meet. Tomorrow, the persons and parties he had to describe could already play a role again, so what mattered to him was to hold up their catalogue of sins to them and to reveal the blame they bore for the defeat of the Revolution. If we realise this, we will learn to appraise the writings all the better, and regard it as no criticism of them if they are declared in need of supplementation.

But there is yet another point that lets the critique they contain seem inadequate today.

The February Republic and Revolutionary Socialism

In his Preface to the *Class Struggles*, Friedrich Engels openly stated that in 1848, Marx and he had significantly overestimated the level of the societal development that had been reached, and the speed of the course of development; that their view at the time, namely that the next crisis would bring a repeat of the Revolution and that, in the course of this, after a series of unavoidable struggles between the classes opposing the bourgeoisie, the role of the decisive factor would pass to the proletariat, rested on a misrecognition of the economic situation; that they were not clear about the fact that "the state of economic development of the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production".[4] In other words, Marx and he did not think quite as optimistically

as the mass of French socialists, but still much more optimistically than the state of economic development warranted. But it is now clear that judgment about subjective measures must also shape itself according to one's insight into objective possibilities and the importance of the various societal classes that is contingent on this. All the more so if the one casting judgment was a man of such consistent theoretical thinking as Marx. What he rejected because he believed that capitalist society was already fairly close to collapse, he would necessarily have had to dismiss less sharply if he had known how great a piece of work capitalist production still had before it in 1848. In any case, socialist historiography today, as indebted as it is to his masterful analysis of the driving forces of the February Revolution, may take on his conclusions without caveats only where they are not influenced by miscalculations in his presuppositions.

Nobody has emphasised more astutely than Marx the relative strength of classes in France at the outbreak of the February Revolution, nobody has drawn with greater clarity than he the consequences of this relative strength for the shape of the young Republic. The revolution against the bourgeois monarchy was not an uprising of the proletarian masses against the bourgeoisie, but rather an uprising of the former in conjunction with the broad mass of the bourgeoisie itself against the haute-bourgeoisie, an outrage of the industrial classes against the domination of the finance aristocracy. The proletariat, which was far from being the strongest of the classes that were rising up against the dominion of finance, was, apart from the capital city, *the least numerous class among them*, "almost disappear[ing] under the vast majority of surrounding peasants and small tradesmen". The struggle of the wage-worker against the industrial capitalist was in France of 1848 "a mere local fact", which hence also "could not form the prominent national feature of the revolution". The idea of the socialist workers, that the rule of the bourgeoisie was abolished with the introduction of the February Republic, rested on "[taking] the financial aristocracy for the entire bourgeoisie".[5]

Up to this point, the Marxian depiction cannot be disputed. And likewise the conclusion that over the course of the Revolution, the illusions that emerged from this confusion had to be dissolved one after the other.

But these illusions were not just illusions of proletarians. Besides other non-proletarian elements, which overestimated the scope of the February Revolution, the social-revolutionaries recruited from all classes belong here as well—who before February were organised in secret associations, and afterwards dominated in the revolutionary clubs. Marx almost does

not go into the role of these clubs at all; only in the discussion of 15 May are Blanqui and his friends briefly described as the true leaders of the proletarian party.[6]

We have already indicated in a note to the text of Héritier's work that we consider it doubtful whether one may describe Blanqui and his supporters as the actual representatives of the French proletariat of 1848. Certainly, the "Republican Central Association" had great influence among the Parisian working population, and had many workers among its members. But that is also true of many other clubs, just like the fact that it held up the emancipation of the proletariat through the establishment of a socialist republic as its goal, and does not yet justify that title by itself. Just as little can it be justified by the circumstance that, of all the larger clubs, the association of Blanquists boasted the most enthusiastically active members. Judged according to the immediate purposes of its measures, we would rather have to describe it as merely politically radical, if with it, just as with many other clubs of the year 1848, purpose and conduct had not been so greatly out of proportion to one another. What distinguishes it is not its goal and its composition, but its organisation and the personality of its leader. One can describe it as one of the most influential sections of the proletarian party of 1848, but hardly as *the* proletarian party *simpliciter*.

That the social-revolutionary clubs, with their officer staff composed of ideologues and adventurers of all societal strata could wield so great an influence on the Parisian workers was only possible because *a true workers' party did not exist yet*, but rather had yet *to develop*. Later history has shown that Blanqui's party *was not capable* of forming such a workers' party by itself. The special workers' interests only moderately concerned the mass of Blanquists, they had little understanding for the economic side of the workers' movement, and they were rather more opposed to the nascent trade union and cooperative movement. From the beginning onwards there existed a contradiction between the workers, who went with the Luxembourg group and those who provided the chorus of the clubs, a contradiction that permeates in all manner of shades from there onwards through the entire history of the socialist workers' movement of France. Now, "Luxembourg", that is to say Louis Blanc and his supporters, and not the Blanquists are in our opinion to be regarded as the centre of the French workers' movement in 1848, as the core of the proletarian party.[7] That in the Luxembourg group a great doctrinairism spread, that there they theorised and ruminated while in the clubs they gossiped about daily

politics, does not change anything about this. This ludicrous fantasising [*Spintisiererei*] conformed to the economic position of the Parisian workers, the great majority of whom still belonged to petty industry. Marx recognises this when he writes: "And yet the claims of the Paris proletariat, so far as they went beyond the bourgeois republic, could win no other existence than the nebulous one of the Luxembourg".[8] But besides all manner of "nebulous" projects, the Luxembourg group developed a series of thoroughly practical proposals for the economic elevation of the workers, and its utopianism was definitely no greater than that of the clubs, where they imagined that they could topple not just a government but straightaway an entire societal system as well through surprise assault. The leading spokesmen of the Luxembourg group looked forwards: Albert, Vidal, Pecqueur, Blanc, Considérant, and the workers who stood by their side examined their real conditions, in order to build up on their foundation.[9] By contrast, in the clubs they looked backwards, and drew their inspiration from the past; it was there above all that they sought to ape the men of the great French Revolution. The socialists of the Luxembourg group, just as overall the mass of notable French socialists of that period—so apart from the aforenamed, Cabet, Leroux, Proudhon, etc.—made efforts to prevent any violent clash between bourgeoisie and workers, because they said to themselves understandably that such a clash would as things stood be of no use to the workers, but could only harm the young Republic.[10] Blanqui himself too, as we have seen, shied away from pushing these contradictions to their extremes. But the revolutionary phrase was stronger than him in the club. *Against* his wish and will, the fateful demonstration of 15 May was arranged, which first scared the living daylights out of the delegates who had only just gathered to meet, and then straight after laid bare the hollowness of the pretensions of the social-revolutionaries. "Do not act like madcap clubists", Proudhon had appealed to them a few days beforehand in *Le Peuple*; "the demonstration must be unarmed and stay far away from the National Assembly", Blanqui had cautioned. Instead, they invaded the Assembly by force, terrorised the delegates, proclaimed a new provisional government, and declared the National Assembly dissolved, only to scatter like children who had carried out a schoolyard prank once all these grandiose deeds had been completed.[11]

A list of persons who had been arrested because of the protests on 15 May, published by the police prefecture on 14 July 1848, counts besides 45 members of the "Barbès Party"—at that moment the collective name for the social-revolutionaries in the clubs—36 Legitimists and 58

Bonapartists.[12] Nothing would be more wrong than to translate this proportion onto all the participants in the protests together. The mass of protesters were undoubtedly dissatisfied republicans; all the same, the strong participation of members of anti-revolutionary associations is noteworthy. The list of 45 members of the "Barbès Party", meanwhile, includes some 30 persons in a bourgeois living situation (authors, doctors, tradesmen, officials), seven whose profession is not given in more detail, and *only five or six workers*! Naturally here as well this proportion does not match the mass of the club-revolutionaries who took part in the demonstration; but the relationship of the arrested non-proletarians to the arrested proletarians will be typical for the relationship between the two elements in the *council* or the *committees* of the club-revolutionaries. So even if a large part of the Parisian workers also joined the protests—which, after all, were officially announced as a peaceful demonstration for Poland—then it is still very doubtful whether one can describe it as a revolutionary protest *of the* Parisian proletariat against the bourgeois National Assembly. At the time, all sorts who were only making revolutionism blithely presented themselves as part of the proletariat.

In this way, that ambiguous situation was brought about that made the battle of the June Days unavoidable. Because distinctions became blurred, the delegates from the provinces, who had only half been won round for the Republic, wrongly identified the workers' movement with the club movement, and let themselves be whipped up into an ever more agitated mood against the Parisian workers. As a result, after 15 May they showered Louis Blanc with insults and thundered against the party of the Luxembourg group, which of all the radical Paris associations would have been the most prepared for mediation.

* * *

Additional remark from the work about the February Revolution.[13] If it is right that the majority of the constitutive National Assembly did not comprise republicans who were as dyed-in-the-wool as would have satisfied the demands of Blanqui and the revolutionary clubs, this naturally does not mean that the people who now set the tone in the chamber were altogether closet monarchists from the start. Their majority consisted of people who had unreservedly recognised the republican state form, over and above which they naturally did not forget their particular class interests. The elections had taken place under circumstances that were favourable to

the republicans; the entire public opinion of the country still lay under the spell of resistance against the corruption of the July Monarchy; there is no better evidence for this than the candidates' professions of faith. The election took place on Easter Sunday, and no worker was prevented from casting his vote, and even if the parties did not shy away from any means of casting suspicion and even lying in the election campaign, there was still no question of any economic pressure being brought to bear on the vote. The cries of the revolutionaries that the Assembly was only a false popular parliament [*Volksvertretung*]—incidentally exactly the same as what the royalist press claimed—are only accurate insofar as it was not the representation of the people [*Vertretung des Volkes*] of revolutionary *legend*.

> Universal suffrage did not possess the magic power which republicans of the old school had ascribed to it. They saw in the whole of France, at least in the majority of Frenchmen, citoyens with the same interests, the same understanding, etc. This was their cult of the people. Instead of their imaginary people, the elections brought the real people to the light of day, that is, representatives of the different classes into which it falls.[14]

So Marx in *The Class Struggles in France*. In the same work he says later on:

> Even revolutionary French writers, awed, as it were, by the republican tradition, have strengthened the mistaken belief that the royalists dominated the Constituent National Assembly. On the contrary, after the June days, the Constituent Assembly remained the exclusive representative of bourgeois republicanism, and it emphasised this aspect all the more resolutely, the more the influence of the tricolour republicans collapsed outside the Assembly. If the question was one of maintaining the form of the bourgeois republic, then the Assembly had the votes of the democratic republicans at its disposal; if one of maintaining the content, then even its mode of speech no longer separated it from the royalist bourgeois factions, for it is the interests of the bourgeoisie, the material conditions of its class rule and class exploitation, that form the content of the bourgeois republic.[15]

In short, Blanqui had spoken the truth in that the chamber did not have a majority of republicans who stood in the same position to the working class as the Mountain party of the convent did to the bourgeoisie; no majority of socialist democrats.[16] But otherwise the National Assembly was not at all less republican than the French "people"—that is, the actual

people—but in fact rather a good deal more republican than it. The social-revolutionaries, who lived in legendary mindsets, were incapable of seeing that. They wailed about lies and deceptions and still did not want to admit to themselves that they above all had grounds to consider that there is also such a thing as self-deception. But so far as it struck them through the force of facts that the given class division, the social needs of the epoch, were not conducive to the republic they aspired to, this recognition only led them to search for means that lay outside this in order to bring about the social revolution they wished for by force—a beginning that under all circumstances could only end in reaction.

For the correctness of the foregoing explanations, the fact can serve that Lamartine, in whom at the time the idea of the bourgeois republic incontrovertibly found its classic expression, was elected no fewer than ten times. In *Paris*, the metropole of the Revolution, he received the *highest number of votes* of all candidates, namely 259,800. He was followed next by the remaining members of the majority of the provisional government. Of the members of the radical minority of the government, Flocon received 121,000, Ledru-Rollin 132,000, Albert 133,000, and Louis Blanc 120,000.[17] The candidates featuring exclusively on the list of the Luxembourg group (of workers' guilds) were defeated, all and sundry. Even Barbès and Pierre Leroux, despite the support of the trade unions, received in all of Paris only 64,065 and 47,284 votes. It did not go better in the industrial centres of the provinces. We have seen how the workers in Limoges and Rouen were defeated. In Lyon, the city of so many workers' uprisings, the revolutionary central committee managed to push through two communists, but the majority of those elected were republicans of a moderate tendency. "The proletariat as a class", Daniel Stern writes, "was defeated in this election campaign."[18] But since it itself only amounted to a minority of the population, it also could not emerge from this campaign as anything other than a minority at all.

With his ponderous reflections on "the mystification of the general franchise", Proudhon only contributed to bringing to a head the confusion in the ranks of the revolutionaries. "The general franchise has lied to the people", he wrote on 3 May. But he came closer to the truth when he wrote a few days beforehand: "The Revolution of 1848, as an economic revolution, is the most bourgeois thing there is. It is the workshop, the counting-house, the housekeeping, the exchequer—the most prosaic things in the world, which provide the least material to revolutionary energy and sonorous words. For good or ill, we must consign ourselves to being mere petty-bourgeois philistines."[19]

The Constraints of the Provisional Government

The composition of the population and the state of industrial development in 1848 permitted nothing other than a civic republic [*bürgerliche Republik*], but this could not brook a mere makeshift solution. Trade and industry were depressed—after all, there had already been a crisis for months—bankruptcies followed upon bankruptcies, public as well as private credit were undermined. Louis Philippe's government had left a significant deficit behind to the Republic, and the heroic means of wholly or partially unburdening itself of the debts accrued by its predecessor through state bankruptcy had seemed too dubious to the members of the provisional government for them to make use of it. Whether it would have improved their financial position is a hard question to answer; in any case it could not have been predicted that even without recourse to that, and despite a general resolve to calm the temper of the capitalist world by paying the due coupons of state debts ahead of time, the rate for government bonds would soon reach a point that could not have fallen lower if the Republic had suspended interest payments or reduced them until further notice. On the Paris stock exchange the situation was as follows:

	Shares in the Bank of France (per share)	*Papers for 5 per cent sovereign debt (per cent)*	*Papers for 3 per cent sovereign debt (per cent)*
23 February 1848	3180 francs	116.4	73.8
7 March 1848	2400 francs	89	56
15 March 1848	1300 francs	65–69	48.45
5 April 1848	1080 francs	50	33

In these numbers is reflected the entire misery, the tremendous difficulty of the situation of the provisional government. Whatever it did to calm the commercial world, almost everything turned into the opposite. It had taken office with 192 million francs in the exchequer, and a level of monthly expenditure of 125 million francs. It had abandoned a series of sources of income (salt tax, newspaper stamps, drinks tax) and taken on a vast number of new expenditures. The attempt to issue a voluntary bond went wrong, instead the bank creditors stormed the bank and the depositors the bureaus of the savings bank in order to withdraw their deposits.

The members of the provisional government saw the day edge ever closer where they would have to cease their payments. In these dire straits, the finance minister Garnier-Pagès, after the excessively cautious Goudchaux had stepped down, resorted to the idea of raising revenues by imposing a supplementary tax on top of the four taxes that already existed.[20]

People were unduly hostile to this measure. Undoubtedly, it was a political mistake that the government did not accede to the request put forward by Louis Blanc and Ledru-Rollin, and supported by Dupont de l'Eure, to exempt the lower tax classes from the additional burden.[21] But it is a great exaggeration to say that through this tax they sacrificed the farmers to the bourgeoisie. Where it affected petty farmers, this happened *against* the intention of the tax's authors, and in contradiction to the fundamental principles that had been expressly prescribed for its levying. It was supposed to affect *property* and generally speaking did so too. But we know today how well the larger and middle-sized landowners know how to play the part of the ailing farmer when it is a matter of shaking off a tax. And when the government used part of the money raised in this way to open credit bureaus in the provincial centres, which were supposed to help the embattled commercial world up onto their feet, it provided the reactionary landowners with a slogan that found the most favourable sounding-board among the mass of farmers, whether taxed or not: "They give to the cities at the cost of the flatland." In this juxtaposition every proprietor in the countryside was a peasant [*Landmann*]—"Jacques Bonhomme"—even if he had a rent of a hundred thousand at his disposal.

The provisional government found no class in the countryside whose interest was aligned with the victory of the "social republic" that had been proclaimed in February. It had no land to turn over to the farmers like the Revolution of 1789, instead approximately 25 per cent of the country landowners were well-to-do farmers, who left nothing to be desired in their anti-collectivist mindset. They had thrown a sop to the day-labourers and cottagers by waiving the salt tax; to play them off against the middle-sized and larger farmers was impossible as things stood, given the dispersed state of the farming population. Likewise, the provisional government could find no class in the urban population that offered it firm backing. It was too socialist for the bourgeoisie, too civic [*bürgerlich*] for the socialist workers, and even if some of the latter were insightful enough not to place any serious hurdle in the way of the government, between them and the rousable party of the workers there stood the revo-

lutionary clubs. But there, as even Hippolyte Castille, who was thoroughly favourably disposed towards the revolutionaries, writes, the goddess Folly held "parliamentary" sway.[22] "What absurdities this people can babble altogether over the course of a few weeks", he adds, "is unbelievable. Oratorical miasmas of the worst sort poisoned the atmosphere." The clubs acted as if they were the true rulers of France, and in fact they wielded great influence precisely at the start, in the most important period of the Republic—they terrorised the public opinion of Paris.

With the exception of those clubs in which the doctrinaire socialists (Étienne Cabet, the Phalansterians, and others) championed their ideas, and which at least did not compromise the Republic,[23] the democratic-republican clubs were the playground of agents of the various government members and those who aspired to govern.[24] This applies especially to their central base, the oft-mentioned "Club of Clubs". Various members of the provisional government gave subsidies to this association from the secret fonds that were at their disposal—in total it is supposed to have received over 160,000 francs—but the money was used more to compromise the Republic than to promote its cause among the people. The emissaries that the club sent into the provinces used ludicrously boastful language, which only scared people off, and in Paris itself they turned people's heads with reminiscences of 1793. The "Club of Clubs" met in the afternoons, and in the evenings its members went, section by section, into the various other clubs to further spread the received wisdom. "But the darkness of the Club of Clubs", Castille writes, "was only illuminated by the reflection of the memories of 1793. Yet one does not govern with memories. This organisation, which could have been an effective tool of action in the hands of some more masterful people, became through the fatuous and childish way in which it was led merely a means of raising the bewilderment that the situation had caused even further." Daniel Stern comes to a similar verdict. And in the *Peuple* of 29 April, Proudhon called on the workers not to let their heads be turned in the clubs. "The parliamentary fever has become a general one. Instead of *one* speakers' platform we have ten thousand of them, and what kind we have! Never has one seen such confusion of the gift of eloquence. All the world speaks like Demosthenes; yet they argue like Lapalisse.[25] […] Workers, it is not in the clubs that we give battle to property; it must happen in your workshops, in the market. Soon we will study this new strategy with you. Leave politics and oratory to the bourgeois. The rhetorical arts of the clubs cannot teach you anything."

As ever, Proudhon here goes a little overboard, but still he touches on a painful subject. And if his "strategy"—his project of credit and exchange banks—was likewise uncalled-for among the workers, one must all the same recognise that at least in its intention it was consistent with the need for time. It wanted to enliven circulation and thereby give production an effective impetus. By contrast, in the clubs everything possible was done to intimidate the commercial world and thereby endlessly intensify the crisis. They imagined that in this way they were spurring on the revolution, but in reality they only drove it all the faster into the wake of the counterrevolution. Spurring-on too must take place with sense and understanding if it is not to achieve the countervailing effect. Only in their phrases did the clubs represent proletarian interests. In reality, they were the breeding-grounds of revolutionary quixotery. How far they misrecognised reality emerges from the fact that they in all seriousness submitted to the delusion that they could disperse at their discretion the chamber elected on the basis of the general franchise if it did not turn out according to the wish of the Parisian "people".[26]

So if Marx, who so fittingly derives the underdevelopment of the French proletariat of 1848 from the underdevelopment of its economic conditions—the backwardness of the development of production—nonetheless sees the clubs as the representatives of the working class, that is a contradiction, which may find its solution in the error recognised as such by Engels, but still a contradiction which one cannot silently ignore today. The radicalism of the clubs definitely did not correspond with the given interests of the working class; the politics of the clubs is not to be explained by these interests, but by the illusions and ambitions of the clubs' major figures, who mostly did not even belong to the proletariat at all.

"Public credit and private credit", Marx writes in the *Class Struggles*, "are the economic thermometer by which the intensity of a revolution can be measured."[27] That is incontrovertibly right. But when Marx continues: "The more they fall, the more the fervour and generative power of the revolution rises", then that depends quite greatly on circumstances—whether economic chaos can become a favourable prerequisite for the creation of viable new formations. Precisely in modern society with its uncommonly entangled connections, with the increased mutual dependency of spheres of production, it is hard to admit such a notion. Workers can at a certain time have an interest in shutting down "all the wheels" for a while, but never an interest in all these wheels rusting away.

The Wrong Stance of the Classes Towards One Another

The Revolution of 1789 began with the rule of the constitutional bourgeoisie, which was superseded by ever more radical factions, one after another, until the year 1794 brought the sudden reversal. The February Revolution of 1848 started with what had been the high point of the great Revolution, and which could even now only be the high point of the redistribution of power, given the composition of the entire population of the country: a government comprising representatives of the most progressive bourgeois parties *and* the working class. Not the more measured socialists, who saw this or at least felt it, and accordingly encouraged their supporters to support the provisional government, but rather the Don Quixotes and Dulcamaras of the Revolution, who gossiped about a repeat of the trajectory of the great Revolution and turned the heads of the Parisian workers with their interminable reminiscences of 1793, they were now *reactionary*. The citizenry, which was agitated anyway by the continuation of the crisis, was made completely nervy by the fiery speeches and articles of the major club figures, and in its bitterness lumped all the socialists together. A bloody confrontation became unavoidable. But in this it must be maintained that it was *not* the true *interests of the proletariat* that made it unavoidable. "Neither were the proletarians pushed by immediate and recognised necessity to overthrow the bourgeoisie; nor were they strong enough for the task", Karl Marx writes very aptly.[28] In the fact that the Parisian proletariat was forced into the June uprising by the bourgeoisie lies already its condemnation. But this "force" is itself a peculiar matter.

The way in which the dissolution of the national workshops[29] was ordered and carried out was undoubtedly a model of tactlessness, and could have no other effect in light of the tense situation than as a challenge. However, it was no bolt out of the blue, but rather part of a whole chain of provocations and counterprovocations, whereby personal intrigues, the vanity of the inventor, and adventuring conspiracy had almost as large a part to play as true class contradictions. Besides class interests and class prejudices it is individual and clique interests that burst against one another and intensify the clash. If it had become inevitable that the Paris workers "had to be taught insight into the true state of affairs through bullets", then to this insight belonged perhaps the recognition that the "dictatorship of the working class" was still an impossibility

for a long while yet, but not the "truth that the slightest improvement in its position remains a utopia within the bourgeois republic" (Marx).[30] On this point, Marx rather had himself yet to work out the faultiness of the dogma of the social-revolutionaries of those days, which then also later happened in England.

The raving of the clubs brought the commercial crisis to a head. All enterprises stagnated, the trust of the commercial world was totally undermined. The rush to the "national workshops" became ever greater. Besides a refuge for the truly unemployed, it became a gathering place for the *lumpenproletariat* from the capital, and a convenient shelter for striking workers. As we have seen, cases piled up of workers whose bosses did not want to raise their wages, summarily laid down their work and let themselves be provided for until further notice at state expense in the national workshops, where they did not know what to do with the regiments of these diversely qualified and variously-minded workers.

A problem from which even in more peaceful times all political economy threatens to land on the rocks took on a frightening character in this way. And even without any other reason, then already the simple assessment that every coming revolution will presumably have to deal with the same problem—and in fact probably on a still greater scale—is already reason enough for socialist historiography to leave aside the sentimental and agitatory slogans of the time when it addresses the question of the national workshops, and to get to the root of the facts as precisely as possible. Generalisations such as "*the* bourgeoisie" and "*the* proletariat" are already of no use because in the bourgeois as well as the proletarian camp the most diverse factions [*Parteiungen*] existed and the most varied motives influenced people's minds.

It is true that the national workshops ultimately only compounded the ill they were supposed to keep in check, and that their continued existence hence threatened the interests of the workers just as strongly as those of the bourgeois classes. Because the conditions for superseding bourgeois society were not yet right, every far-reaching infraction against its true foundations had to affect *all* societal classes. Conversely, the removal of the national workshops was followed by a strong improvement in commerce, so that for a very great part of the workers who had been accommodated in them beforehand they in fact became superfluous. Naturally, the return of trust in the commercial world was still more due to the disappearance of the revolutionary hotbeds which the national workshops had latterly become, as well as the disappearance of the strike insurance into

which they had started to turn themselves, but under the given circumstances the one could no longer be separated from the other. The continued existence of the national workshops would have meant the dictatorship of the workers who had streamed into them together, and because its leading spokesmen did not realise that this was not possible, the struggle became inevitable.

* * *

Additional remark from the work about the February Revolution.[31] The author has given an account of the eternally memorable June battle with all the passion that must have overcome all of those who in those days fought behind the barricades of the insurrectionists or stood in their hearts at the side of these fighters. He sees this bitter struggle and the persons acting in it with the eyes of the contemporary fellow-fighter. That lends his description a warmth and vividness that it would have seemed unjust to him and his readers to tarnish. Hence we have, so far as his account goes, restricted ourselves to a few explanatory notes, which we hope will not cause his depiction to lose any of its sheen.

Retrospectively, however, may we be permitted a few words of critical consideration. Without question, this battle was a tragedy, the most devastating tragedy that a poet's imagination could conjure. When saying this, we are not just thinking of the immense number of those who were cruelly murdered and exiled, we are also thinking of the great spiritual suffering that it caused its best fighters on both sides. For one does not exhaust it if one describes it as a bloody intensification of the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. It does not represent a pure example of class struggle. This is not because workers also fought in front of the barricades, and members of the bourgeoisie behind them. Classes will never divide so absolutely that in moments of action every class party [*Klassenpartei*] will not feature elements from classes other than its own in its ranks. But in June 1848, men fought against the proletarian-revolutionary party whose previous life and later behaviour showed that their entire feeling and thinking was far more with the working class than with the privileged, men who would under other circumstances have stood decidedly on the side of the workers. On the other hand, for some personalities who had not accompanied the workers onto the barricades but still *incited* them onto them, a true and not merely temporary victory of the workers would have been the greatest inconvenience in the world.

It was a piece of class struggle, provoked by the collective effect of irritations that for a great part did *not* stem from class contradictions, or at least not *those* class contradictions as which the June battle presented itself and as which it will also always count historically. No vital interest of the bourgeoisie as such required the immediate dissolution of the national workshops, and no vital interest of the proletariat their preservation in their existing form.

The so-called ateliers had outgrown their founders. In them, they had wanted to build up a reserve army for the civic republic, and they had become a recruitment ground for revolutionary socialism—and for Bonapartism. Under other circumstances, one would have transformed them as unobtrusively as possible, step by step, and the opposition that this transformation encountered would have led to a demonstration, but without having provoked so desperate an insurrection. However, in the midst of a revolution, where every day can cost parties and party grandees [*Parteigrößen*] their position, the quickest solution seems the best one to them. One can reasonably doubt that the people who took up the slogan "there must be an end to this affair" truly had in mind mass slaughter. Perhaps they took an attempt at violent resistance into account, but they hardly had an inkling how gigantic its scale would be. The outcome of the *coup de main* of 15 May allowed them to hope than any potential uprising would be easily dealt with. No drop of blood needed to be spilled on that day, the bubble of the National Assembly's destruction by revolutionary Parisians burst of its own accord.

In any case, one does well not to take the reports from those days stemming from partisans too much at face value. Given the heat which people's passions had reached, an objective consideration of matters was out of the question. To the easily rousable French nature, gifted with a curious mixture of credulity and suspicion, matters could not appear in their true light. What some were driven to bit by bit by events, passions, and prejudices, their opponents saw as actions they had planned from the beginning. The world appears peopled with Machiavellis. The most unlikely things are believed, and natural explanation is derided as superstition.

Hence, a man like Cavaignac appears to the democrats and revolutionaries of 1848 as a devilishly calculated violent man, who placed thousands of people's lives at risk in cold blood only to achieve the goal of his ambition.[32] Did the "June Butcher" really fit this depiction? Many facts tell against this assumption, even if one does not lend any credence to his colleague Bastide, who claims to have seen him weeping in his room on

the day of victory.[33] If we admit the necessity of putting down the insurrection—and for the civic republic it was a necessity—Cavaignac's military measures can be judged even only from a military point of view. It is advisable to free oneself of the melodramatic notion that saw a heroic act in every shot that came from the barricades, but a murderous one in every shot that was fired against them. If one divides what went on *after* the barricades were taken from what happened until they were stormed, then the number of victims of the battle divides almost in equal parts between the attackers and defenders. A report by the Seine prefect Ducoux, dated 8 October 1848, gives the number of those killed in the battle or who died of their wounds as 1460 altogether, whereof *two thirds* were from the army and the National Guard. This number may fall short of the truth and fail to consider many victims of the victors' thirst for revenge, but in any case it is disproportionately excessive to speak of tens of thousands of fallen June fighters, as English newspapers did at the time. According to a statement given by Cavaignac on 3 July 1848, the total number of insurrectionists was at no time estimated to be higher than 50,000. As far as the butchery and atrocities that took place after the barricades were stormed are concerned, one can only in the smallest number of cases lay the blame on the commanders. Rather, it is clear that these did everything they could to save the lives of their prisoners. Without the intervention of the higher officers, the number of those who fell victim to the soldiers' embitterment would have been far higher than it was anyway. Further, according to general testimony, it is clear that most of the brutal treatment of the barricade fighters was down to the more or less improvised troops (the Mobile and National Guards). Incidentally, that is entirely comprehensible. The rules of war are drilled into the serving soldier from the start, and he experiences battle less as a personal fight than it was for the citizen who had suddenly been called to arms or the military dilettante of the mould of the Mobile Guard at the time.

The behaviour of the Mobile Guardsmen, these "children of the Parisian people", was a dire blow for the romantic disposition that believes it has exhausted class differences in modern society with oppositions such as people and aristocracy, or people and bourgeoisie. It sought to console itself by letting the "children of the people" be drunk and bribed by the bourgeoisie. But why do over twenty thousand "children of the people" let themselves be bribed or made drunk? And if their drunkenness did not prevent them from doing their duty in battle, can it have been so strong that they did not see who they were fighting? One need only raise these questions to

recognise what kind of *cul-de-sac* this romantic-melodramatic conception of things leads to. The indication that the Mobile Guard was recruited to a great part from the *lumpenproletariat* has more value. But one must beware of taking the first part of this word too literally. Lumpenproletarians are not necessarily *lumpen*, they are only people who come from conditions where lumpenisation [*Verlumpen*] lies particularly close, people who have left regular bourgeois employment conditions or the class of commercial wage-workers, and who live off crumbs from the table of the bourgeoisie, or hand-to-mouth in any way. All the members of the Mobile Guard were now in this state, regardless of what they had been before, except that they were now regularly paid. As a parasitical growth on the social body, the Mobile Guard only acted logically if it took up position against the June fighters. Where things come to such a head as they did in those days, it is far less property relations [*Besitzverhältnisse*] than *employment* relations [*Erwerbsverhältnisse*], the way of gaining employment, according to which sides take shape. In short, the June battle showed that not only people and people, but also proletariat and proletariat can look and appear very differently. But it also showed something else.

It is a very popular slogan, which has today almost become dogma, that the bourgeois is cowardly by nature, and the proletarian by nature valiant in battle [*kampfesmutig*]. In general, someone who is living in comfortable conditions will indeed not be keen to put his person at risk, and someone who is used to deprivations and hard bodily effort will stand his ground in battle without all too many misgivings. But this distinction becomes blurred, even works in reverse, if for the bourgeoisie it becomes about the elementary conditions of its existence as a class.

Nothing would be more erroneous than to stay silent about the fact that the bourgeois of the National Guard offered many examples of very great courage during the June Days. It was no small matter to fight against the insurrectionists, who were protected by mighty barricades. The best proof for this is *the high number of officers who were killed*. Six generals fell victim to the insurrection, and six further generals got away with more or less serious wounds. As was shown only a few months beforehand in London, when the Chartists made mien to take matters to an armed assault on the propertied classes, the "handful" of fighters who might carry this out if it came to it is definitely not a contingent to be scoffed at.

The demagogues of the press and the tribune, who had incited the workers to fight at the barricades, did not tell them this. There, it was only ever a small clique of exploiters and intriguers, with whom "the people"

have an easy time. When it came to the fight, matters presented themselves differently. If Cavaignac's estimate of the number of June fighters is not too far from the truth—and it is not obvious why the victor should have diminished the significance of his victory on the day after it—then behind the barricades there were barely half as many fighters as the dissolved national workshops had had members, whereas the National Guard alone could muster one hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand bourgeois and petty-bourgeois fighting troops in an emergency, quite apart from the army and the Mobile Guard.

And where was the bulk of the Parisian workers? Why did the number of their fighters on the barricades only amount to fifty thousand with about ten thousand in reserve?

One must assume that a great part of the workers regarded the insurrection as hopeless from the outset, and instinctively felt that its victory could not improve the situation. "I am not sure", wrote Proudhon on 11 July 1848 in the *Représentant du Peuple*, "that in the confusion that would have had to follow our victory, the good that the insurgents hoped for would not have been outweighed by still greater ills." This motivation for his having stayed far from the insurrection sounds far more likely than what he says about this a year later in the *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, where he pathetically holds his fourteen days of parliamentarism responsible for having "foreseen nothing, known nothing, suspected nothing" before 25 June, that in the days of the insurrection he had been a "simpleton" who let himself be deceived by Flocon's "ministerial canard", according to which the movement was "led by political factions and sponsored from abroad".[34] Firstly, this "canard" was only an exaggeration of actual events, which our good Flocon probably believed himself, and secondly, a great number of socialists also stayed away from the insurrection who were not in the "representative pickle", and were not prevented by their parliamentary spectacles from seeing what was happening among the people. On the contrary, with many of them one could say that they stayed away *because* they could see what was happening. There is just a strong contrast between the socialists of yesteryear and the mass leaders of today. Even if the view of the former was dulled by doctrinaire love-ins, they still overall represented greater insight into general relations and a wider scope of view, whereas the newly-minted agitators knew only one theme: the effect of the day. It was precisely the latter who had pushed the despairing masses to rise up, adventurers of all kind had rooted for it, which self-evidently had not remained unknown to the socialists and their support, and had

awakened their mistrust. This is perhaps the most natural explanation for the fact that so many of them did not also climb onto the barricades. Apart from that, the insurrection lacked a certain immediate goal. "Bread or lead!" was a cry of desperation, but not a plan of action [*Aktionsparole*], nobody dared in earnest to demand the restoration of the national workshops, the dissolution of the National Assembly that had only just been elected was unfeasible—in short, one knew well why, but hardly *for what* the insurgents were fighting. When it came to the battle, the Legitimist and Bonapartist agents struck their colours. To fight to replace the National Assembly with a people's emperor [*Volkskaiser*] would have made sense, but to fight to replace the civic republic with a socialist one was senseless from the moment that the general franchise had shown that the hour of the latter had still not come by far. Not quite in the way that Proudhon means it, but still on the point it is referring to, his claim that a victory for the June fighters could not have given the workers anything that they did not have already is entirely true. The purely political obstacles to emancipating the proletariat had fallen, and the economic ones were not to be removed from the world by barricades. As Marx says in the *Class Struggles*: "Neither were the proletarians pushed by immediate and recognised necessity to overthrow the bourgeoisie; nor were they strong enough for the task."[35] All the more deeply thinking socialists saw this more or less clearly before their eyes, and many workers did as well.

But others' eyes were blinded by the language of the demagogue press. Upholding the principle of the freedom of the press can be no reason to deny the power of the press to do bad. A press also needs to mature. But in June 1848 it still festered in the ground of the recently emancipated political literature: the lightest and worst wares floated on top. "While the founder of positivist philosophy, M. Auguste Comte, gathers barely two hundred loyalists in his lectures, the *Faubourien*, the *Père Duchêne*, and the *Vraie République* lead the country." This heavy sigh by Proudhon applies above all to Paris. Everything there was working to turn the population's heads. The demagogue press of the monarchists, which did not yet dare to reveal its true intentions, competed in this noble effort with countless papers which nakedly turned demagoguery into a business. All the historians of the February Revolution agree that the political scandal press initially drove those papers that were organs of particular political *convictions*, whether bourgeois or socialist, into the background almost without exception. Of the more serious papers, the *Représentant du Peuple* succeeded in winning regard, to agree

with its main collaborator Proudhon, only because Proudhon attacked all the parties without distinction, and the baffling paradoxicality of his articles kept alive people's curiosity. But Proudhon's articles must be read and studied in conjunction with each other for their political content to be recognised; for the readers of the day they were only biting critiques of negative characters, brilliant fireworks that contributed more to completely bewildering people's minds than to bring them any light.

> Improvisers, men without knowledge or experience addressed haphazardly, without preparation and consideration, the most difficult questions of public law and traced them back, all and sundry, to I know not what doctrine of the 'infallibility of the people', which made the effort of individual reason unnecessary. The word 'people' in their mouths received a narrow meaning and now only meant the industrial proletariat. When the moment came where the people should exercise their civic right and affirm its legal sovereignty, they unsettled its respect for the National Assembly in advance and spread the destructive idea, which makes the construction of a democratic state forever impossible, that, if the election result should not come out to the liking of the Parisian people, it would be justified in giving it short shrift and disposing in every suitable way of those who had been elected by dint of the general franchise, the representatives of France.

In this way Daniel Stern/d'Agoult describes the speeches held in the clubs, and she adds:

> A number of newspapers, which save for their titles were only pale imitations (of 1793), supported this agitation by the clubs only too effectively. To catch the attention of passers-by, and captivate their basest curiosity, the newspapers circulated and hawked on public streets competed with one another in their cynicism and violence.—The papers of a higher character, which could have neutralised the effect of this crude bawling, had lost every credibility. The *National*, which was regarded by the people as a semi-official government paper, and even the *Réforme*, whose chief editors were now in power, attracted no interest anymore. Cabet's *Populaire* only interested the Icarians. The *Atelier* shared the unpopularity of the *National*, with which it was closely connected.

And so on until the *Peuple Constituante* of old Lamennais, whose solemn diction and thoughtful dialectic could not compete with the uncouth ranting and personal gossip of the *Père Duchêne* and similar papers. The bandits of the quill [*Banditen der Feder*] who poisoned and baffled the Parisian

people in these papers at random bear at least an equal share of responsibility for the bloodshed in the June Days as the obstinate bourgeois in the Chamber, and this blame is not lessened if this lying work happened at their own expense rather than in the pay of some reactionary party.

This is the underside of the June insurrection, which surely gives the picture a somewhat different character than if we only look at the battle on its own. But if history is to be our teacher, then we must inform ourselves about all the facts that influenced the events we are looking at. We must seek to unite the creative power of the poet, who lets men and battles come to life anew, with the conscientious strictness of the naturalist, whose magnifying glass does not leave the tiniest detail unexamined.

The Republic and the Republican Party

The failure of the February Revolution was, we said above, that it started with the most extreme of the governing constellations that were possible at the time, with what should have had to be the high point of its upward development. A more radical government than the one proclaimed on 24 February would have been absolutely impossible, and a government comprising only socialists was ruled out under any circumstances given France's social constitution. Even the mixture of bourgeois republicans, petty-bourgeois radicals, and socialists, which the provisional government represented, matched at most the social composition of the people of the major cities, but not that of the entire nation. Despite this, the nation would probably have tolerated it if conservative and moderate-republican governments had ruined themselves beforehand, one after another. Whether such a development was possible under the given circumstances must surely remain undetermined, but we will meet no great opposition if we claim that it would have been the most favourable for the consolidation of the republic. Thus, in 1871, a Gambetta-Floquet-Clemenceau government might perhaps have spared the Commune—although it would hardly have been entirely without a confrontation with the social-revolutionaries *à la* Flourens and Rigault—but after it a monarchist restoration would undoubtedly have had a far easier time than it had under the development that began with the "gathering of esquires" at Versailles, which first let it and its variants work themselves to exhaustion before the decided supporters of the Republic brought it to power. A revolution that starts by bringing the most extreme radical party to power over and above all the other parties

resembles a drama that starts with its final act: it can only move downwards.

The radical republicans of 1848 did everything to expedite this downwards development, and to drive the entire population that was not sworn to its dogmas into counterrevolution.

It was a fateful mistake then and still is in many ways today that the juxtaposition bourgeoisie-proletariat is used without distinction for the most varied combinations in which these two classes or parts of them confront one another. One moment 'bourgeoisie' means the entire non-proletarian world, another it means only the class of major capitalists, one moment 'proletariat' refers only to the industrial wage-workers, another almost the entirety of non-capitalist society. It is clear that this uncertainty of expression must be a cause of the coarsest misunderstandings and mistakes. In 1848 was added to it also the wide-ranging meaning of the word 'republic'.

After 24 February, the overwhelming mass of the population had accepted the Republic, even if naturally in very varied conceptions of the term. But only a small minority represented dynastic interests under the cover of republicanism from the start. The hopes of the dynastic coteries were in those early times so slight that even its most zealous partisans found a patient attitude to be advisable. To *ruin* this advantage as far as possible, the clever radical republicans of Paris invented the famous distinction between 'republicans of yesterday' and 'republicans of today'. Only the former were genuine, the latter were all of them "suspicious". But since the 'republicans of yesterday', that is, the people that had committed to the republic under Louis Philippe, formed a small minority of the population, this meant in practice that they declared *the Republic as the cause of a minority of the population*. Along with those who strove for monarchy, against whom they could have found another way of protecting themselves, they turned away people who merely had the flaw that they had placed no greater importance on the form of government: out of people who had accepted the Republic more or less willingly they made people who now only suffered it as the lesser of two evils; out of latecomers they made new opponents. When Ledru-Rollin in his publicly pronounced instructions to the commissaries of the Republic adopted the tone of the convent men of 1793, and challenged them to ensure that "the new Chamber only contained people of yesterday, but not people of the morning after the Revolution", then that was an instruction to the latter to take up their position against him and his colleagues in the provi-

sional government from the outset, and to criticise their measures as disparagingly as possible. And when he allowed George Sand to declare in the *Bulletin of the Republic*, published under his official name, that "if the elections that have just been advertised do not come out according to the wish of the Parisian people, it would proclaim its will for a second time and remove the resolutions of a false National Assembly from the agenda", then with that he invited the provinces to make a stand against the hubris of the Parisians. But since in Paris the 'republicans of yesterday' dominated, then with that the direction was already given to the provinces to send as many 'republicans of today' to the Chamber as possible, people who for their part likewise only accepted the Republic conditionally.

But the language of the 'republicans of yesterday' did not only perplex the capitalist word.

To the classes that lie between bourgeoisie and proletariat belong apart from petty-bourgeois and farmers also the mass of *officials*. Especially in France, they formed a very stately host, and through their oversight over matters that their position and education allowed them they exercised great influence over the population precisely in the countryside. The great majority of officials were naturally republicans 'of today', since as declared republicans they would not have been appointed under Louis Philippe. Under these circumstances, the circulars of Ledru-Rollin, his instructions to the commissaries of the Republic, and the conduct of several of these gentlemen had to rouse great anger precisely in officialdom. But as subservient a tool as a bureaucracy may be towards a firmly entrenched government, it can make itself just as awkward for a government that depends on the moods of the day. One cannot rid oneself of officialdom overnight, least of all if, like the provisional government of 1848, one neither wishes to nor can touch existing property titles. Quite needlessly, the officials were driven to make common cause with the bourgeoisie. In ordinary times, the official does not find himself so closely tied to the exploiting class that he cannot allow himself the luxury of an opinion independent of it; but if the existence of civic order seems to him to be seriously put in doubt, then in nine out of ten cases he fights on the side of the party that represents this order. The same applies to a further number of classes or professional categories that do not live directly from the surplus acquired from exploited labour, without otherwise belonging to the exploited, such as doctors, teachers, clerics, engineers, clerks, etc. All these people occasionally like to be included under the heading of working classes; but if the struggle between wage-labourers and bourgeoisie is brought to a head, the mass of

them fights on the side that secures their existence, that is on the side of the bourgeoisie that represents order and regulated commerce, as well as the government most conducive to it.

Of all this the radicals or, as they called themselves in 1848, the democrats saw and noticed nothing. They superimposed the template of 1793 onto these completely changed conditions, and hence only saw the "people" in contrast to the "privileged". Others believed themselves to be more precise if they spoke of the "proletariat". But both words were used as melodramatically as each other, as figures of speech that blurred more than they revealed. What Karl Marx said to his opponents in September 1850 at the split of the Communist League applies to the entire democratic revolutionary movement of 1848 too: "Just as the democrats abused the word '*people*' so now the word '*proletariat*' has been used as a mere phrase."[36] For them, the concepts of 'people' and 'proletariat' were fetishes with supernatural force. And indeed it cannot be denied that this fetishism lent the movement a strength that seemed able to overcome anything. But its magic did not last. The people *after* the Revolution was a different one and will always be different to the people *before* the Revolution. The mass that gathers together under a slogan that only represents a *negation*—and even the Republic was as such initially only a negation, the negation of Louis Philippe and the July Monarchy—will always split as soon as it is a question of giving this slogan positive content. The superstition in the reality of the fetish 'people' was the doom of the democratic-revolutionary party of 1848.

The *Coup d'état* Before the Verdict of History

When evaluating the *coup d'état* of 2 December 1851, the mistake is usually made of eliding the *way in which* this was carried out with the *fact that* a *coup d'état* was attempted at all. But that is a quite superfluous concession to the political superstition of radicalism.

Marx describes excellently in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* how the radical, whom according to the custom of the time he still calls a democrat, because he believes that in himself he represents the people's interests, in this firm belief "comes out of the most disgraceful defeat just as immaculate as he was innocent when he went into it".[37] Included in this is already another effect of the wondrous democratic belief. The radical can only be defeated through treason and perfidy; to defeat him is more than a political, it is a moral blemish. It is this perspective from which one must evalu-

ate a goodly share of the imprecations with which radical historiography has showered the *coup d'état* of 2 December 1851 and its perpetrators.

Nothing can lie further from the author of this piece than to wish to offer an apology for Louis Bonaparte. But the third Napoleon today belongs to history, and has a claim to impartial evaluation. And there is not the slightest reason for socialist historiography to portray the man and his work any differently from how they actually were. It has no interest in attacking or defending them, it is thoroughly disinterested towards them.

That the *coup d'état* of 2 December was provoked by very many things that preceded it, nobody can deny. Marx, who certainly does not spare Louis Bonaparte, has shown in the most fitting way how little the *coup d'état* may be presented as a surprise assault on the French nation, and how long before 2 December it had cast its shadow and shaped the talk of the day. Only the moment and the way in which it was carried out came as a surprise, not the matter itself.

In substance, it was already heralded by the election of 10 December 1848. One cannot say of that election that it was not the expression of the free will of the people, insofar as this can even announce itself in an election at all. Not Bonaparte, but his opponents were in government at that moment, and used governmental influence wherever possible to push through their candidate Cavaignac. Despite this, the French people gave Cavaignac barely one-and-a-half million votes, but gave the heir of the Napoleonic title five-and-a-half. Even convinced republicans did not deceive themselves that there was more to this vote than the preference of X over Y or over a collection of Y's, that it was a referendum on *personal* government. But they did not have the capacity to bar the way to the Empire, which was drawing nigh almost with the necessity of fate. Quite the opposite. Everything that happened on the republican side to weaken the executive power concentrated in Louis Bonaparte's hands—attempted revolts in the streets, intrigues in parliament—only had the effect of expediting the event. "To make the general franchise the foundation of republican institutions and thereupon immediately to disempower it by challenging its results and its principle, to vilify the National Assembly, to injure its rights of access, to interrupt its consultations, to dissolve it, if not in fact then still in their intentions, only to cast themselves as its defender later on; to brand the nascent constitution, to tear it down piece by piece only to barricade themselves behind it mere days later as if it were a fortress—that was," H. Castille writes, "all in all the

policy of the republican party in the time between the April elections in 1848 and the *coup d'état*." That hits the nail on the head, and shows why the Republic had to fall. It lacked republicans; for of those who called themselves that, the majority had everything except truly republican sentiment. The Empire was not the product of the reaction of a class, it was the product of the reaction of a *nation*. Louis Bonaparte could have had the *coup d'état* without a decent part of the use of violence to which he allowed himself to be driven by his impatient confidants. In Autumn 1851, the Second Republic was as wormeaten as the bourgeois monarchy at the start of 1848. It needed only a moderate shake, and this fruit too fell to earth like a ripe pear. The mass of the French were just not yet republican, they may well have tolerated the republican state form after the February Days, but they had found ever less to like about it. 5½ of 7½ million Frenchmen had voted for Louis Bonaparte to be President on 10 December 1848; 7½ million against 650,000 declared themselves in favour of the *coup d'état* on 20 and 21 December 1851; and 7,800,000 against 250,000 invited Napoleon to restore the Empire on 7 November 1852. One can say of the second of these votes that it came too quickly after the *coup d'état* to allow the nation a fully considered vote, but between the *coup* and the third vote eleven months had passed, and during this entire time the question of the Empire was continually talked about, in all the papers, in all the committees, in all businesses, in all family circles. Wherever the Prince-President went, he was greeted by the cry: "Long live the Emperor!" Even if only hired *claqueurs* started it, the great mass joined in with it every time. From the vote of 7 November 1852 the indisputable fact emerged that the great mass of the French people endorsed the Empire. The reddest *départements*, the constituencies that had sent decided socialists and revolutionaries to the Chamber, produced oppressive majorities for the Empire. Even Paris, the capital of the Revolution, had given the *coup d'état* its approval with an absolute majority of its eligible voters (196,539 out of 392,096), and a two-thirds majority of its voting population (196,539 yes against 96,497 no). What the various classes and individuals thought when they waved farewell to the Republic in this way is one thing, what they actually did was nothing other than to retrospectively legitimise the "oathbreaking" of 2 December 1851. With that, they declared at the same time that the crime of 2 December had been not the unprecedented violation of an unwilling nation, but had rather battered down the chamber door to a willing lover.

As a breach of the constitution, the *coup d'état* has no equivalent except the proclamation of the Republic on 24 February.

If democracy is to survive, it must learn to recognise the mistakes it has made without reservation. The year 1848 brought the proof that the tasks of the nineteenth century cannot be solved with the formulas of the eighteenth. The legend of 1793 went bankrupt, and Louis Bonaparte took over its liquidation.

Notes

1. [Ed. B.—Apart from small, purely stylistic changes, nothing has been changed in this essay. Instead, the appendices to some of his chapters, mentioned in the Foreword, are attached, followed by the chapter Users' Guide.]
2. Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864), Prussian lawyer and political philosopher, advocate of state socialism and a parliamentary route to power, longtime rival of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels within the German social-democratic movement, founded the first German labour party, the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, in 1863.
3. Census suffrage, as opposed to equal suffrage, is an electoral system where votes cast are weighed according to a predetermined census ranking (e.g., by education, economic position), with a higher rank equating to higher vote weighting.
4. Friedrich Engels, 'Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (1895)', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 27: Engels 1890–95* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 512.
5. Friedrich Engels, 'Two Years of a Revolution', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 10: Marx and Engels 1849–51* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), p. 361.
6. Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), French socialist revolutionary and political philosopher, advocate of revolution not by a mass uprising of the working class but via a transitional dictatorship of an elite cadre of dedicated activists, often cited (usually negatively) as prefiguring Leninism.
7. Louis Blanc (1811–1882), French socialist politician and historian, coined the modern usage of the term 'capitalism', supporter of reformism, a prominent role for religion in revolutionary socialism, as well as workers' cooperatives and a right to work.
8. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848–1850*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 10: Marx and Engels 1849–51* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), p. 55.

9. The Palais du Luxembourg had functioned as a legislative building since the 1789 French Revolution, and the Luxembourg Commission were socialists and radicals who were chosen as workers' delegates to an industrial parliament established there in February 1848 under Louis Blanc's presidency, which was tasked with proposing solutions to urgent social problems.
10. Étienne Cabet (1788–1856), French utopian socialist political philosopher, supporter of workers' and artisans' cooperatives, founder of the egalitarian 'Icarian' movement as well as several unsuccessful utopian communities in Texas and Illinois. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), French mutualist political philosopher and federalist politician, advocate of cooperative workers' associations and peaceful social revolution, 'father of anarchism' whose vigorous theoretical disputes with Marx contributed to the demise of the International Workingmen's Association.
11. [Ed. B.—Louis Blanc tells of the revolutionary Huber, who proclaimed the dissolution of the National Assembly on 15 May, and other historians corroborate this, that he sought to gain his freedom as a political prisoner under Louis Philippe by promising to reveal secrets, and the very same Huber, again a prisoner, directed an appeal for clemency to Louis Bonaparte in January 1852, wherein he promised to recognise the Empire. With all that, he later insisted that his conscience was clean, that he had only made that promise to play a prank on those who kept him prisoner, and because he could not bear prison any more. He seems indeed not to have been a traitor in the conventional sense of the word. But in any case he was a moral weakling, who could offer no resistance to any impulse. And precisely these sorts of people held sway in the clubs!]
12. Armand Barbès (1809–1870), French republican conspirator and revolutionary, one of the most embittered opponents of the July Monarchy (1830–48), notable for his long-lasting antipathy and rivalry with Blanqui.
13. [Ed. B.—The demonstration of 15 May 1848 was, in line with the true intention of its organisers, a protest against the National Assembly, which, they claimed, "did not represent the true opinion of the republican people". The additional remark above refers to this.]
14. Marx, *Class Struggles*, p. 65.
15. Ibid., p. 72.
16. The Mountain, or Montagnards, were a political party of the radical urban middle class in the French First Republic (1792–1804), opposed to the Girondins, and were responsible for the 1793–94 Terror under the leadership of Maximilien Robespierre.
17. Ferdinand Flocon (1800–1866), French republican journalist and left-radical politician, editor of the revolutionary journal *La Réforme*, initially

sided with the Mountain but was turned towards an increasingly reactionary position by the June Days, decried by Marx as a petty-bourgeois traitor to the French working class. Alexandre Ledru-Rollin (1807–1874), French lawyer and progressive-republican politician, founder of *La Réforme*, instituted universal male suffrage as Minister of the Interior in the 1848 provisional government. Alexandre Martin, "*l'ouvrier* Albert" (1815–1895), French socialist politician, close ally of Blanc and vice-president of the Luxembourg Commission.

18. Marie de Flavigny, Comtesse d'Agoult, pseudonym "Daniel Stern" (1805–1876), German-French historian and political writer, author of a notably vivid and objective *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (1850), hostess of a well-known republican salon during the French Second Empire, friend and rival of George Sand and life-partner of the composer Franz Liszt.
19. [Ed. B.—*Représentant du Peuple*, 20 April 1848.]
20. Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès (1803–1878), French anti-monarchist politician, Mayor of Paris and Minister of Finance during the early French Second Republic, introduced drastic measures (including a notorious "45 *centimes* tax" on land, movables, doors and windows, and patents) in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent money shortages and bankruptcy. Michel Goudchaux (1797–1862), French banker and politician, predecessor and successor of Garnier-Pagès as Minister of Finance, abandoned some of the provisional government's more radical pledges (including railway nationalisation) in an attempt to restore French credit.
21. [Ed. B.—The proposal was rejected with the justification that many well-to-do people were in the ranks of the lowest-taxed property-owners, and that it could only be told from the *personal* conditions of the former whether they would avoid the tax or not. Under this view, which is in itself incontrovertibly correct, the local authorities were given instructions to waive the tax supplement for poorer taxpayers, and the revenue from the tax was set at 30 million less than it would have been under an unconditional levy. But the local authorities often did the opposite of what the government circulars entrusted them with, and even where they acted in the spirit of the circulars, their decisions gave many people umbrage. Those who were refused kicked up a fuss even if they had been rightfully turned down. Through a general prescription to exempt the lower tax classes, they would have avoided the entire uproar and spared the young republic of a source of bitterest attacks.] Jacques Charles Dupont de l'Eure (1767–1855), French lawyer and politician with a long career of service under revolutionary and restorationist regimes, opponent of the July Monarchy, President of the Council of Ministers and *de facto* French head of state February–May 1848.

22. Hippolyte Castille (1820–1886), French writer and polemicist, collaborator of Frédéric Bastiat and Gustave de Molinari, author of *Histoire de la seconde République française*, 4 vols. (1854–1856).
23. [Ed. B.—In his book about Cabet, which is well worth reading, H. Lux accuses him of having preached 'quietism' to his followers in the days of February, and thereby contributed much to the failure of the June Days uprising. This because Cabet told his followers not to immediately expect the realisation of communism from the Republic, but rather to support the provisional government for the time being, and to be good republicans in the first instance. Cabet's 'quietism' consisted in the fact that, despite his Icarian plans, he advocated political and economic reforms with zeal, yet did not expect much from the barricades.]
24. The Phalansterians were followers of the utopian socialist political philosopher Charles Fourier (1772–1837), whose model of a *phalanstère* referred to the ideal of a collection of buildings designed for communal use, intended to provide the elements necessary for organic, harmonious coexistence in a community called a *phalange*.
25. To "argue like Lapalisse" was a common expression meaning to deal in obvious truisms.
26. [Ed. B.—What a baleful role the same conceit played in the early months of 1919 in Germany may be presumed to be well-known here.]
27. Marx, *Class Struggles*, p. 59.
28. Engels, 'Two Years of a Revolution', p. 368.
29. [Ed. B.—As is well known, the areas of activity for roadbuilding and the like, which were introduced to billet the unemployed and were financed by the state, bore this name.]
30. Marx, *Class Struggles*, p. 69.
31. [Ed. B.—What follows here applies to the June uprising with its murders that lasted for three days. Héritier's account of this struggle, which still took the traditional view strongly into account, occasioned the additional remark above.]
32. Louis Eugène Cavaignac (1802–1857), French general and politician, Minister of War and President of the Council of Ministers June–December 1848, commander of the government troops during the June Days uprising.
33. Jules Bastide (1800–1879), French liberal-republican politician, active opponent of the July Monarchy and editor of the radical journal *Le National*, Minister of Foreign Affairs February–December 1848 and supporter of Cavaignac.
34. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Les Confessions d'un Révolutionnaire* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1851 [1849]).
35. Engels, 'Two Years of a Revolution', p. 368.

36. Karl Marx, 'Meeting of the Central Authority, September 15, 1850', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 10: Marx and Engels 1849–51* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), p. 626.
37. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 11: Marx and Engels 1851–1853* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), p. 133.

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CHAPTER 20

A Users' Guide for the Present

The defeat of the June insurrection did not just affect the June fighters and the particular socialist party that stood behind them. It affected the entire socialist workers' movement in France. Though it does not completely vanish from the stage, its strength as an independent movement is spent. It is no longer in a position to form an independent party with its own policy, but rather can only engage itself politically by entering a coalition with petty-bourgeois democrats, which effectively makes it their tail. The members of this petty-bourgeois-democratic party call themselves 'socialist democrats' (*democrats socialistes*), which Gottfried Kinkel, who was congenial towards them, then translated as 'social democrats', without suspecting how different a meaning this word would one day acquire.[1] In the elections of May 1849 they manage to bring through a respectable number of delegates to the legislative National Assembly, around 200 of 750 in total, but among them only a very small minority of true representatives of the working class. The majority are democrats whose socialism goes no further than the socialism of the German democrat Schulze-Delitzsch, except with a more radical lick of paint.[2] On 13 June 1849 they too suffer a defeat at a demonstration in Paris, which is bloodless but which has the result that part of its leadership is put behind lock and key, others go into exile, and the party ceases to be taken seriously in the National Assembly. The parliamentary struggle for power now plays out exclusively between the bourgeois republicans and the various groups of more or less outspoken monarchists.

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It would be very interesting and also instructive for contemporary politics, precisely in the days where this piece is being written, to follow more closely the game of intrigues that now broke out between the bourgeois parties in the Chamber, whose outcome was Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état*. Though from different theoretical perspectives, Marx and Proudhon have described it in such mutually complementary and fitting terms that it is advisable to consult the writings of both authors about the developments leading up to the *coup*. Just like that, one will find there how many similarities there are between the game that the bourgeois parties play in the Reichstag and the Prussian Landtag today, despite all the differences in names and programmes, and the game whose arena was the parliament of France from 1849 to 1851.

Marx summarises it in the third section of his work *The Eighteenth Brumaire* briefly as follows. First, he mentions how the proletarian party was abandoned by the petty-bourgeois/bourgeois-democratic party, and then continues:

> The democratic party, in its turn, leans on the shoulders of the bourgeois-republican party. The bourgeois republicans no sooner believe themselves well established than they shake off the troublesome comrade and support themselves on the shoulders of the Party of Order. The Party of Order hunches its shoulders, lets the bourgeois republicans tumble and throws itself on the shoulders of armed force. It fancies it is still sitting on its shoulders when, one fine morning, it perceives that the shoulders have turned into bayonets. Each party kicks back at the one behind, which presses upon it, and leans against the one in front, which pushes backwards.[3]

One only needs to put in place of the above names those of the bourgeois parties in the major German parliaments, and one gets a picture that especially the bourgeois democrats should constantly bear in mind as a warning example.

* * *

However, the picture is historically incomplete. The movement has its beginning in the agitation of the clubs, who dictated its trajectory on the path of reaction through the atmosphere they created. But this atmosphere is among democrats and republicans the fear of repeating what took place in the months of April, May, and June in Paris, and among the

parties of order [*Ordnungsparteien*] the threat of repeating it and its possible consequences. However, one underestimates how general this effect was if one merely traces it back to the tremors of property-owners for their moneybags, as often happens in socialist circles. That alone could not bring about its general pervasiveness. Where this comes about, there is always more at stake than such fear for moneybags; the circles of the nation who are gripped by it feel that more is threatened than profit. Not for its sake did so great a part of the French socialists stay far away from the activities of the radical clubs in 1848. What separated them from these was their insight, set down in more or less theoretically-formulated statements, into the absurdity of the subversive gospels [*Umsturzevangelien*] preached in the clubs, their forced recognition that the attempt to implement them in practice could only cause damage to the entirety of economic life, of the popular mass as well as property-owners. However deficient the scientific justification of these statements often was, however purely intuitively this recognition was often come to, more guessed at than discovered, they still for that reason already had the greater likelihood on their side, because the socialists whom they represented certainly understood more sociology than the club agitators.

But this more superficial realisation cannot be enough today. Reasons must be brought before scientific examination that can withstand scrutiny, for the correctness of this view and the incorrectness of its opposite, in order to have a convincing effect. After all, followers of the latter view appeal to statements in the writings of Marx and Engels, thinkers of whom the last thing one can say is that they are ignorant of sociology.

They can do this because the opponents of the gospel of subversion that was propagated in the radical clubs of 1848 are habitually guilty of posing the wrong question when fighting it, or can be accused of doing so. According to it, it is a matter of the contradiction between revolutionary application of force [*Gewaltanwendung*] or legislative, specifically administrative-technical reform. Indeed, it appears often enough as such in practice. But in the last analysis it is not this that must be distinguished. Law too is violent force [*Gewalt*], and can be a force that causes great economic damage. So too are administrative measures [*Maßnahmen der Verwaltung*].

What must be distinguished is something quite different. I explained this years ago in an essay that I wrote for the major collected volume that appeared with the art publishers Bong & Co., *The Emancipation of Humanity: Ideas of Freedom Past and Present*, and with the permission of

the publisher I include some passages from the piece in what follows.[4] One will see from it why the question it addresses seems particularly important to me. The essay carries the title "The mechanistic and the organic idea of revolutionary force", and is introduced with the following section:

> The dispute that permeates the socialist movement in almost all countries is in its last analysis not a struggle over a new principle. It is only the revival in a somewhat new form of an old contradiction in the conception or the elaboration of the revolutionary principle in the struggle of Social Democracy. If, in general, we understand under 'revolution' the fundamental overturning of a situation, an order, or an intellectual world, irrespective of the form in which it takes place, then in politics we associate with the concept of revolution in particular an overturning that takes place under the application of extraordinary force [*Gewalt*].
>
> But extraordinary force too can be used in various ways. It can be a more or less arbitrarily brutal intervention in the vital functions of a societal body, but it can also mean fostering these vital functions by removing institutions that disturb or hinder them and creating new ones that lend them increased strength. Whether it works in one sense or the other depends on the degree to which it is accompanied by a regulative understanding for the conditions of life and development of the societal organism. So it is necessary for the revolutionary as well as for every other politician to familiarise themselves with these conditions if he does not want to run the risk that his measures only have destructive effects, and not also at the same time creative, life-fostering ones too. In other words, like the statesman who keeps strictly within the confines of the law, the political revolutionary must be all the more at home in social science and its main branch, political economy, so far as he aspires to be a social revolutionary in the full sense of the word. That seems a commonplace truth, but is by no means generally recognised as such, and was plainly underestimated for a long time precisely in the socialist world by the representatives of a certain tendency. Not to speak of the older utopians who describe their ideal state as the work of some great man, which he might simply bring about one fine day by virtue of his power and wisdom, Babeuf and his school, among others, belong under the heading of *those* socialists who regard society as a mechanism, and for whom giving it another form is merely a matter of will and certain powerful means [*Machtmittel*].
>
> In the great French Revolution, Babeuf represents Jacobinism in its most extreme shape. Jacobins in this sense too are also those French socialists who are later called Blanquists after Babeuf's significant successor Blanqui, and their fellow travellers and heirs in other countries. What distinguishes all of them is not, as many people think, the tactic of the political *putsch*, but

rather an almost unlimited belief in the all-powerful creativity [*schöpferische Allmacht*] of revolutionary violence, of which the tactic of the *putsch* is only one derivation. This unlimited belief in revolutionary violence has found its representatives in our times in the wing of the Russian socialists that calls itself the party of the Bolsheviki, which currently holds political power in its hands in Russia. But the Bolsheviki, or to use the German form of the word, the Bolshevists appeal for their politics to Karl Marx. They even claim to be the most consistent representatives of the doctrine of the great author of *Capital*, and Werner Sombart has even emphatically confirmed this in the latest edition of his work *Socialism and Social Movements.* Given the curious spell that Bolshevism has cast not just over the younger elements among the workers, but rather also over many intellectuals in the rest of the civilised world, and given the high regard that Karl Marx enjoys as teacher of the theory and policy of modern socialism, it is surely not wholly irrelevant to know whether the relationship between Bolshevism and Marxism is really like this. The Bolshevists employ the language of Marxism, but language alone does not attest to their prevailing spirit, and the question remains whether or in how far Bolshevism is Marxist in spirit.

Up to a certain point, I believe I have already provided the fundamental aspects of the answer to this in a work that appeared now twenty years ago, which caused quite some uproar at the time. I mean the chapter "Marxism and Blanquism" in the work *The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy.* What was said there about the characteristics and critique of Blanquism applies in my opinion almost to the letter also to Bolshevism. And since today it is no longer a matter of the theory but rather the practice of the doctrine, with its far-reaching social effects, it seems justified to me to publish the chapter here again, omitting the parts that deal with incidental points.

There now follows a passage that can be skipped over here, because what it says already substantially overlaps with what I explained in the previous part. Then it continues:

In Germany, Blanquism is viewed only as the theory of secret leagues and the political *putsch*, as the doctrine of the launching of revolution by a small, purposeful party acting in accordance with well-laid plans. That view, however, stops short at externals and applies, at most, to certain epigones of Blanquism. Blanquism is more like the theory of a method; its method, on the other hand, is merely the outcome, the product of its deeper, underlying political theory. And this is quite simply the theory of the immeasurable creative power of revolutionary political force and its manifestation, revolutionary expropriation. The method is partly a matter of circumstances.

Where there is no freedom of association and of the press, secret leagues are obviously appropriate; and where, in a revolutionary upheaval, the country is *de facto* governed by a central political authority, as was the case in France until 1848, a *putsch*, insofar as only certain experiences were taken into account, was less irrational than the Germans seem to think. For the record of Blanquism includes not only failures but also some very significant temporary successes. The proclamations of a republic in 1848 and 1870 were to a high degree due to the intervention of Blanquist social revolutionaries. On the other hand, June 1848 and May 1871 were, in the final analysis, Blanquist failures. To reject *putsches* does not therefore amount to liberating oneself from Blanquism. […]

In the modern socialist movement, we can distinguish two main streams which appear at various times in various guises and often in opposition to one another. The one starts from the proposals for reform worked out by socialist thinkers and is in the main aimed at *construction*; the other derives its inspiration from popular revolutionary upheavals and is in the main aimed at *destruction*. According to the possibilities inherent in the conditions of the time, the former appears as *utopian*, *sectarian*, *peacefully evolutionary*; the latter as *conspiratorial*, *demagogic*, *terroristic*. The closer we get to the present, the more clearly the slogans emerge, on the one side, as emancipation through *economic organisation*, and on the other, as emancipation through *political expropriation*. In earlier centuries, the first tendency was represented for the most part only by isolated thinkers and the latter by occasional popular movements. By the first half of this century, permanently active groups were established on both sides; on the one, the socialist sects as well as all manner of workers' associations, and on the other, revolutionary societies of every kind. […]

Marx's theory tried to combine the essentials of both streams. From the revolutionaries it took the conception of the workers' struggle for emancipation as a political class struggle, and from the socialists it took the investigation into the economic and social preconditions for the emancipation of the workers. However, this combination was not a solution of the conflict but rather a compromise like the one Engels suggested to the English socialists in *The Condition of the Working Class*: the subordination of the specifically socialist element to the politically radical social-revolutionary element. And whatever further development Marx's theory underwent later, it retained at bottom the character of this compromise, that is, of dualism. […]

Marxism has superseded Blanquism in just one respect, namely, method. But in another respect, the overestimation of the creative power of revolutionary force for the socialist transformation of modern society, it has never completely freed itself from the Blanquist point of view. The corrections it

has introduced—for instance, tighter centralisation of revolutionary power—concern form rather than substance.

In the article from which we took a few sentences as a motto at the head of this chapter, and in which Proudhon, in his own way, predicts the June battle almost to the day, he reproaches the Paris workers who had been influenced in and by the clubs with the fact that, as the economic revolution of the nineteenth century is fundamentally different from that of the eighteenth century, the traditions of 1793, which were incessantly preached to them in the clubs, were in no way appropriate to the conditions of the time.[5] The Terror of 1793, he explains, in no way threatened the living conditions of the overwhelming mass of the population. In the year 1848, however, the reign of terror would see two large classes in collision with one another. As both were dependent on the circulation of products and the reciprocity of relations, the collision between them would mean the ruin of all.

It was expressed with Proudhonistic exaggeration, but considering the economic structure of France at the time, it hit the nail on the head.

In France in 1789–94, more than nine-tenths of production and exchange was limited to local markets; thanks to the low differentiation of the economy in rural areas, the internal national market played a very subordinate role. So far as the industrial classes were concerned, the Terror did indeed ruin individuals and occasionally certain local industries, but however severe it was it affected national economic life only very indirectly. No section of the classes engaged in production and commerce was as such threatened by it; the country was thus able to endure it for a considerable period, and the wounds which it inflicted on the country were quickly healed. In the year 1848, by contrast, the uncertainty into which the composition of the provisional government and the emergence and conduct of the seemingly all-powerful clubs threw the business world meant increasing closures of business enterprises and paralysis of trade and commerce. Each aggravation of this state of affairs and each day it was prolonged meant yet further ruin, yet more unemployment, and threatened the whole business population of the towns, and to some extent also that of the open countryside, with enormous losses. There could be no question of a socio-political expropriation of large and small capitalist heads of production; industry was not sufficiently developed for such a move, and no organisations which could take their place were available. It would only have been possible to replace one individual with some other individual, or with a group of individuals, which would have done nothing to change the social composition of the country or to improve the condition of the economy. Experienced business managers would have been replaced by newcomers with all the weaknesses of dilettantism. In short, a policy modelled on the Terror of 1793 would have been the most senseless and futile imaginable; and because it was senseless, it was

more than merely silly to don the costumes and to revive and surpass the language of 1793. Precisely because a political revolution was in progress, this policy was a crime for which thousands of workers would soon enough have to atone with their lives, and further thousands with their liberty. For all its grotesque exaggerations, the warning of the 'petty-bourgeois' Proudhon therefore evinced a degree of insight and moral courage, in the midst of the Saturnalia of revolutionary bombast, which placed him politically high above the literati, artists, and other bourgeois bohemians who draped themselves in the 'proletarian-revolutionary' mantle and yearned for new Prairials. […]

All the indications are that any uprising in the advanced countries in the near future will take this form. The bourgeois classes in these countries are no longer in the slightest degree revolutionary, and the working class is already too powerful to be able to confine itself to critical opposition after a victorious uprising which it has won for itself. Particularly in Germany, the progress of party development up till now means that on the day after a revolution anything but a Social Democratic government would be an impossibility. A purely bourgeois radical government would not last a day, and a compromise government composed of bourgeois democrats and socialists would, for all practical purposes, mean either that a couple of the former were included as decoration in a socialist government or that Social Democracy had surrendered to bourgeois democracy. At a time of revolution, this is surely a most improbable combination.

We may safely assume that considerations of this kind came into play when Engels, in the preface to *The Class Struggles*, extolled universal suffrage and parliamentary activity with unprecedented emphasis as means to the emancipation of the workers and dismissed the idea of seizing political power by revolutionary assaults.

That was a further rejection of Blanquist, albeit modernist Blanquist, ideas. But the question is nonetheless examined exclusively with reference to its importance for Social Democracy as a *political party*. The poor prospect for future uprisings of conscious minorities is demonstrated on the grounds of changed military and strategic conditions; and the participation of the masses, enlightened as to the character of the complete transformation of the social order to be taken in hand, is stressed as an unavoidable precondition for implementing this transformation. However, that covers only the *external means* and the *will*, the *ideology*. The *material* basis of the socialist revolution remains unexamined; the old formula, 'appropriation of the means of production and exchange', reappears unchanged; there is not a single word to indicate that, or whether, anything at all has been altered in the economic preconditions for the transformation of the means of production into state property by means of a great revolutionary act. Only the *how*

of *winning* political power is revised; as regards the *possible economic utilisation* of political power, the old doctrine derived from 1793 and 1796 is retained.

Wholly in accordance with this conception, Marx, in 1848 in *The Class Struggles*, had written: 'Public credit and private credit are the economic thermometer by which the intensity of a revolution can be measured. *The more they fall, the more the fervour and generative power of the revolution rise*.' An authentic Hegelian proposition and one most illuminating to all minds nourished on a Hegelian diet. However, there is always a point at which ardour ceases to be productive and operates only as a destructive and devastating force. As soon as that point is passed retrogression rather than progression sets in—the reverse of the original purpose. It is on this that the Blanquist tactic has always foundered in history, even when it was initially victorious. Here, not in the *putsch* theory, is its weakest point, and it is precisely here that it has never been criticised from the Marxist side.[6]

* * *

So far that chapter from 1899. If I expressed myself harshly and polemically in it about that fact that Marxist literature was still lacking a sufficient critique of Blanquism, this was caused by the circumstance that precisely at that time elements in German Social Democracy seemed to be gaining influence that, by bringing up statements from the early literature of Marxism, presented these to German workers in such a manner that one could derive purely Blanquist conclusions from it. […] Marx's scientific doctrine, which he set down at the height of his intellectual creation in the works *On the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Capital* (1866), is very decidedly a sociological *doctrine of development*, which self-evidently also recognises *will* and *violence* as factors of historical development, but at the same time brings to recognition the *very particular limits of its possibilities.* The proof that the socialist overturning of society is tied to the achievement of a certain maturity of the level of production, without which it cannot be enforced, but with which it becomes a necessity, is the fundamental idea of the part of Marx's philosophy of history that concerns itself specially with the prognosis of bourgeois-capitalist societal order, and lends it its epoch-making significance. In substance, this philosophy of history provides the refutation of the specifically Blanquist belief in the omnipotence of violence and the unlimited creative power of revolutionary will. While Marx was still alive, and expressly in agreement with him, Friedrich Engels offered a critique of the doctrine of the sociological omnipotence of violence in the chapters on "The theory of violence" in his work *Herr Eugen Dühring's Overturning of*

Science and in his polemic against the Russian socialist Peter Tkachev (to be found in the collection *International Matters from the Peoples' State*, 1891).[7]

Unfortunately, these latter tracts do not go so closely into that doctrine to be able to count as an exhaustive reckoning with their Blanquist interpretation, and I have regretted this. But those of Marx and Engels' statements that can be positively interpreted in a Blanquist way belong altogether to their early period, which one can see as the years 1842 to 1852. Certainly, Marxism is already then a sociological doctrine of development. But it is not yet elaborated as such so far as to immediately recognise the *organic element in development*. Its statements can still be interpreted as if society were fundamentally still a mechanism, which one can give a desired form at every stage of development as soon as certain forces have even developed at all, as long as one possesses sufficient external powerful means.

Now it is in this vein that the Bolshevists in Russia and their partisans in other countries today understand those statements in the writings of Marx and Engels that refer to the conquest of political power by the proletariat as the precondition of socialist revolution in society. They raise anew *will and violence as all-powerful factors* of societal transformation. The organic component in Marxist doctrine is ignored, *the mechanistic way of thinking retains the upper hand* and determines political agitation and practice. It is a departure from statements that Marx and Engels wrote later. Those among the ranks of the Bolshevists and their school who know the writings of these thinkers are well aware of this too. "We cleave to the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*", Rosa Luxemburg declared frankly. That included an acknowledgment that the Marx who went deeper into the nature of the laws of societal life is an awkward witness for Bolshevism. In fact, Marx and Engels declared in the preface to the new 1872 edition of the *Communist Manifesto* that the passage in it that deals with revolutionary transitional measures would now have to sound different in many respects than at the time it was written. The Paris Commune had especially offered proof "that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes".[8] They refer to Marx's work *The Civil War in France*, where this is further developed in the third section. But in the aforenamed work one finds discussed the fundamental outlines of a democratic-federal organisation of society, which should have as its foundation the general franchise that the Bolshevist regards with such contempt.

The fact that the doctrine of Bolshevism stands in contradiction to Marx's theory, which is scientifically worked out, naturally does not already prove its defectiveness by itself. Marx too was not infallible, and many conclusions that he drew from his theory have turned out to be only partially correct. But Bolshevism does not deviate from Marx where historical

> experience has corrected him, but rather where it has confirmed him. With Marx, the socialist revolution is the culmination of an *organic* process of development, whose accordance with laws he masterfully showed. In Russia, Bolshevism was an attempt to *mechanically* apply Marx's formulas to an undeveloped societal organism. This attempt admittedly failed, as it necessarily had to, and today its authors, Lenin and his comrades, are gradually shifting towards reconstructing an economic situation which they thought they could lift their country beyond through mechanical application of force. They are doing so after deliberately ignoring the organic laws of development *made the same frightful conditions come true in Russia that Proudhon predicted in 1848.* And *no country will be spared this same experience* where, once Social Democracy has come to power, the mechanical idea of revolutionary violence wins the upper hand over the organic one. I believe I have made clear the reasons in the chapter cited here. Bitter will be the revenge everywhere, endless prosperity will be destroyed, unspeakable sorrow and misery will be brought to millions, where revolutionary caesarist mania [*Cäsarenwahn*] imagines it will be able to defy the statement that Marx wrote in the preface to the first volume of *Capital* in 1867:
>
> "Even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement […] it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs."[9]

So if the bourgeois-democratic parties have quite a lot to learn from the February Revolution of 1848, this is no less the case for socialists. The effects of the mistakes which both have to safeguard against already appeared there visibly, but the vast economic-social changes that have taken place in the interim, the mighty spread of industry, of organs of trade and intercourse, together with the tremendous growth of its personnel of employees and workers of all kinds, and the far-reaching changes these caused in the size and composition of societal classes, have—even though they only changed a little the play of party oppositions in its fundamental outline—greatly refined the societal organism and thereby made it only more sensitive to disturbances through a politics of arbitrary brutality. Hence it lay in the interest not only of capitalists and their closer retinue, but rather also of the working class and its equivalent societal strata that, when the Revolution brought them to power, their measures for transferring property and economic enterprises into the possession or under the control of the general public kept within such limits and moved in such forms that the economic function of the societal organism as a

whole did not suffer any serious damage. The legal security of property that was not claimed for the community [*Gemeinwesen*] directly and on the basis of legal acts had to remain definitively guaranteed; every intended socialisation had to be conceived and executed as a step of organic economic policy; the taxation of capital and income had to be kept within incidentally fairly wide limits, beyond which it intervened seriously by confiscating capital that was indispensable for industry innovation and expansion. Both the socialist *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* appointed by the Revolution in its first days as well as the Socialisation Commission of outstanding theorists and practitioners of social and economic policy it introduced grasped this, and set it out in the appropriate declarations, which contributed more than the great mass of people was conscious of to ensuring that the young Republic's economic life initially continued on its path without serious interruption, and later only came in danger of being derailed as a result of disturbances and external pressure.

So far as these disturbances were caused by measures or threats by the powers who had been victors in the world war, they have nothing to do with the subject of this essay and can hence remain undiscussed here. But it is a different matter with the agitations and actions of the disciples and agents of Russian Bolshevism, who called themselves communists.

How their economic-political and social-theoretic nature is to be evaluated was outlined earlier. They emanate from a roughly mechanistic conception of the political economy of modern states, and in so far it is no coincidence that in Russia their doctrine was hatched at a time when tsarism had just been toppled and the formal logic of absolutist thought that underpinned it still pervaded the political atmosphere of the country. The sociological intellectual schema of Bolshevism is no different to that of tsarism as this manifested in its most typical representatives. But in its application it had to have still far more destructive effects, because it became a formula for leaps which even the most absolutist of tsars had not allowed themselves.

However, the Bolshevist-communist movement has not remained restricted to Russia, which has barely emerged from the atmosphere of tsarism, but has gained significant support in countries that are socially and culturally far more advanced, and in some of them even gripped the majority of socialists. How should we explain this?

It is well known that the Bolshevists use state means to spread propaganda for their doctrine and swamp all countries with their agents on a scale for which world history offers barely another example. And that

officially-sustained and systematically-practised propaganda may achieve much as far as influencing people's minds is concerned, the history of intellectual epidemics teaches us. However, this does not offer an exhaustive explanation of the propagandistic successes of Bolshevism. This is only made possible because a second mighty factor supports it. And that is the continued existence of slogans in the agitation of Social Democracy that stem from the time when that socialist theory and phraseology emerged from which Bolshevism deduces its most seductive arguments. Between this phraseology, inherited from the past, and social-democratic practice today there exists a contradiction that makes it easy for the agitators of Bolshevism to win over inexperienced young workers and sociologically-uneducated fiction writers [*Belletristen*] of all ages to their doctrine, which, as coarsely simplistic as it is, at least has the appearance of greater logic.

For example, an entire series of turns of phrase belong here that present the contradiction that obtains between capitalist and worker in such an intense way that the significance of the development of capital for workers as a class beyond this is completely left in the dark. Marx certainly identified this contradiction sharply enough, but he—and this separates him from his socialist predecessors—never underestimated or concealed the great significance of capital as a lever for emancipating the workers. Let those who behave as if exploitation only came into the world with capital be reminded of his statement in the first volume of *Capital*: "Capital has not invented surplus labour [of the worker above what he earns]".[10] And if he shows there how emerging capitalism adds to the horror of underpayment also the horror of overwork, he notes in the third volume:

> It is *one* (!) of the civilising aspects of capital that it enforces this surplus labour in a manner and under conditions which are more advantageous to the development of the productive forces, social relations, and the creation of the elements for a new and higher form than under the preceding forms of slavery, serfdom, etc.[11]

In other words, Marx does not let himself be dissuaded by the—in his time—still almost unlimited exploitative tendency of capital from emphasising its great civilising—in a historical sense one may even say emancipatory—mission. But how do we know whether this mission still exists or has not already lapsed? Even someone who is only somewhat *au fait* with political economy knows that this question cannot be answered already by use of formulas from Marx's *Capital*, since Marx may well have written a

critique of political economy, but not a textbook. Here, examining the function of the capitalist businessman in the various branches of economic life is decisive, as well as the possibilities of replacing him. Only those businessmen whose function has become superfluous can be regarded as parasites on the societal body. Extracting surplus labour on its own, where it is not associated with extortionate exploitation, does not already make them such, since surplus labour, as one can also read in Marx, will always exist, in the socialist community as well. Now even in a highly-developed industrial state there are wide areas where the businessman in fact still fulfils a function that the state-run or communal enterprise cannot perform for the general public in an equally advantageous way. Among other things, the expert Alphons Horten, definitely no friend of the capitalists, demonstrated this in his work *Socialisation and Reconstruction*, and also—which is what it comes down to—given indicators that carry decisive weight for resolving this question of function.[12] From the insight of practice, Social Democracy—both its factions, in fact—has also grasped the problem, and adjusted its economic policy measures accordingly. But the language of social-democratic agitation and press has been barely influenced by this, a mistake that would not have all that much to it in normal times, but in times of brewing anxiety in people's minds can have very damaging effects, as we see. We are not yet out of this period. More than ever, politics determines economics today, and the domain of politics today is dominated by spirits of revenge and mistrust, which can one day cause terrible crises. Hence it is a vital requirement [*Lebensgebot*] for Social Democracy as itself a representative of a particular policy, which it would not be able to implement without an inner solidity of the party and the required strength and firmness of the masses standing behind it, to undertake an inspection more keenly than hitherto of its traditional slogans and enlighten the masses about their true meaning and value. Let us not deceive ourselves about this. It is not only material drives from which the political passions of the masses draw their nourishment. Ethical sentiment [*Empfinden*], which we more colloquially call a sense for what is right [*Rechtsgefühl*], always plays a role as well and on occasion is decisive. The senseless acts of destruction and violence that the communist uprising in Central Germany has shown recently would be inexplicable for a great part if misguided ethical sentiment had not suffused the young lads by whom they were carried out. But how much these insurrections strengthen the reactionary, anti-republican currents in bourgeois and petty-bourgeois circles is too obvious to need further particular statistical proofs.

But the bourgeois-democratic parties might let the fate of their predecessors from the year 1848 serve as a warning example. In Germany, they went so far as to pave the way for elements to enter the government of the Republic that have only accepted it provisionally [*auf Kündigung*]. In its consequences, this has led to them driving Social Democracy out of the government of the Republic and into opposition. But in the moment where the workers' party goes into opposition, the economic class struggle takes on a more intense character quite by itself. Here, one thing follows another with natural necessity. Where the path of such parliamentary games ultimately leads, the epoch 1848 to 1851 has also shown. The fundamentally different social composition of the economic constitution today compared with then, however, allows us to predict that the end of the Republic this time will not be monarchy, but anarchy with all its depredations.

What France could endure in 1851 and 1852, given the state of the world at that time, without any serious endangerment of its national existence, would mean for Germany, given the situation caused by the *Kaiserreich* having lost the war, the surrender of all the preconditions and prerequisites of its recovery from the war's consequences. For them, Germany is reliant on the trust of other peoples in its peaceful foreign policy, and the faith of international Democracy of the working classes in the tenacious preservation of its domestic reform policy. If here the Republic were to fall, then with it would fall any prospect of an accommodation by foreign countries in alleviating the oppressive obligations that weigh on it.

Even more than in France of 1851/52 the restoration of the monarchy in Germany today would only be possible as the result of a political reaction, borne by the urge for an aggressive foreign policy, as is also pursued by parties who bait their followers with references to such a foreign policy. But if Europe in those days placed no trust in the slogan "The *Kaiserreich* is peace", then contemporary Europe, which looks rather different to that of the middle of the nineteenth century, would more than ever lend no credence to such an assurance. For this reason already both capitalist and socialist, both imperialist and democratic foreign countries would confront a second German *Kaiserreich* with the most extreme suspicion and the most hostile sentiment, to which would then also come the conviction that, hated by the socialist workers of all hues, it would inwardly still only be a colossus with feet of clay.

Friendless and devoid of credit—that is the only prospect that the restoration of the monarchy offers the German people with any certainty. All else is a deceptive mirage.

Under these circumstances, the question of the Republic is for Germany not just the question of a form of government, which some may like more, and others less. It is the question of its entire existence, its possible future. Bourgeois politicians who do not one day want to incur the bane of having betrayed the Republic through a policy of continual self-abandonment [*eine Politik beständigen Selbstaufgebens*] should mark these words. It is the curse of half-measures in these matters that they are only certain to strengthen the opponent, and weaken the thing they are supposed to protect in the eyes of its own supporters. Important positions have already been lost through this, and others will be lost if bourgeois democracy keeps on letting the Republic appear to the people as a political commodity. Our people can only be saved if it is taught this insight in words and through actions, at every opportunity and in the most distinct way:

On the preservation of the Republic hangs your fate, hangs the entire future of your country!

Notes

1. Johann Gottfried Kinkel (1815–1882), Prussian-German Protestant theologian, author, and democratically-minded politician, in exile professor for literary and art history in Britain and Switzerland.
2. Franz Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch (1808–1883), Prussian-German lawyer, social reformer, and progressive-liberal politician, along with Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen forefather of the German cooperative movement.
3. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 11: Marx and Engels 1851–1853* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), p. 124.
4. Eduard Bernstein, 'Die mechanistische und die organische Idee der Revolutionsgewalt', in Ignaz Jezower and Paul Adler (eds.), *Die Befreiung der Menschheit: Freiheitsideen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co., 1921).
5. [Ed. B.—The cited passage is taken from the issue of *Représentant du Peuple* of 29 April 1848, and reads:

   > When the nation has already exhausted its resources; when the country is devoid of commerce and industry; when the workers, demoralised by club politics and factory stoppages, enlist as soldiers in order just to survive; when a million proletarians mass together for a crusade against property; when hungering bands roam the land and organise plunder; then the peasant guards his crops with loaded gun and gives up farming; when the curse of desperation reigns over all of France—O, then

you will know what a revolution is, a revolution evoked by lawyers, accomplished by artists, and led by novelists and poets. … Awake from your slumbers, Montagnards, Feuillants, Cordeliers, Muscadins, Fansonists, and Babouvists. You are not six weeks away from the events I foretell. Cry: Long live the Republic! Down with the façades! Then turn around and go forwards! Six weeks later—22 to 25 June 1848—came the June battle.]

6. Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, Henry Tudor (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1899]), p. 38, 40–46.
7. Pyotr Tkachev (1844–1886), Russian writer and political philosopher, along with Sergey Nechayev sought to introduce into Russian Marxism a commitment to political action by a close-knit, well-organised revolutionary vanguard party, intellectual forerunner of Leninism.
8. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Preface to the 1872 Edition of the Manifesto of the Communist Party', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 23: Marx and Engels, 1871–1874* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), p. 175.
9. Karl Marx, *Capital, vol. 1*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 35: Karl Marx—Capital Volume I* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), p. 10.
10. Ibid., p. 243.
11. Karl Marx, *Capital, vol. 3*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 37: Karl Marx—Capital Volume III* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998), p. 806.
12. [Ed. B.—The author of this piece has also done the same from another angle in his lecture "The socialisation of enterprises", held on 24 February 1919 in the political science seminar of the University of Basel, which appeared in the Verlag der National-Zeitung, in its stenographic form—sadly partly uncorrected. That the Marxian theory of value must lead to quite erroneous conclusions, if one wants to apply it in practice without consideration for the economic function of the businessman, is explained in my work *The Preconditions of Socialism* in the chapter on the significance of the Marxian theory of value.] Alphons Horten, *Sozialisierung und Wiederaufbau* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Vaterland, 1920).

PART III

Selected Articles

CHAPTER 21

Eduard Bernstein for Unity

Vorwärts, 23 December 1918

Yesterday, members of both social-democratic parties had invited party comrades who had returned from the battlefield to a gathering in the *Konkordiasaal*. The returnees were to be given the opportunity to inform themselves about the political events that had played out during their absence in their home country, especially in party life. The theme was: "Germany's situation and the fraternal struggle in Social Democracy".

The speaker Eduard Bernstein described Germany's present economic condition as thoroughly dire. The war has brought about the collapse of our economic life, and industry is partly bankrupt. This is the situation in which the Revolution came about. *Both* social-democratic parties took over the government. The faction of the Independents *agreed this by a great majority*. This coalition [*Zusammengehen*] is in my opinion unavoidable. A no from the Independents would have been a *crime* against Social Democracy. Had we said no, then the Majority Socialists would have had the ability to take over the government, either alone or together with members of bourgeois parties. In both cases, the government would have got into the most difficult position. Had the Independents said no, then they would have slipped into an oppositional stance towards the government. That would have also provoked the emergence of opposition from the right and made the situation even more uncertain than it is anyway.

There is a law of consequences. According to this law, we have, by agreeing to the coalition with the Majority Socialists in government, taken

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the first step towards a rapprochement. I have not deluded myself about this for one moment. We are now in a quite different situation than before the war.

The party strife must now be buried.

Otherwise we cannot work together at all. Whoever finds that undesirable must logically also be against both parties working together in government.

For what divides the two social-democratic parties? After all, we cannot dispute that those on the other side are social democrats, and that they have social-democratic aims. (*Dissent.*) You can judge the policy of the Majorityists [*Mehrheitler*], but you cannot deny their social-democratic ethos. Whatever they may have done, they have not only constantly insisted that they have still been international social democrats, but have repeatedly offered their hand to international conferences. That you cannot deny! Not fundamental principles and not any goal divide us from the Majority Socialists, but rather only particular methods of struggle. That is certainly no trivial matter. Few have felt that as keenly as I.

The occasion of the split was provided by the authorisation of war credits. Even today I am convinced that the approval was a great political mistake, even a disaster. It is the greatest reproach I have to make to myself that on 4 August 1914 I not only voted for the approval but also spoke in favour of it. (*Bravo!—But you immediately corrected your mistake!*) I have seen the evil that the vote brought to the world. But as passionately as I felt that, I have never denied the others' good faith. For the question was extraordinarily complicated. After all, one could after copious reflection also come to the point of view that the authorisation of war credits was necessary. The Majorityists just look at things differently than we do, and they act according to *their* conviction. According to my conviction, they look at things wrong. They do not see that it would have been much better to secure the international cohesiveness of the proletariat by rejecting the credits. They only see the danger Germany is in. On one point they were maybe more correct than we were: If we now see how imperialism manifests itself in France and England, who will then say that the Majority Socialists were wrong? But I still find their policy wrong now.

As passionately as I felt the contradiction between both tendencies, in Gotha I still spoke and voted *against* founding a separate party of the Independents. *Kautsky and Haase likewise.* I have been a social democrat for 41 years, and I know the old struggles between Lassalleans and

Eisenachers because I myself observed them, and fought enthusiastically alongside them. In 1874, I would not have believed that we would reunify a year later. It happened despite the embitterment, despite the hatred with which the two social-democratic tendencies were fighting each other. But I do not want to experience such fraternal struggles once again.

After the Gotha resolution, we had three social-democratic parties: the old party, the Independents, and the *Spartakus* group. These were joined in 1917 by

the influence of Russian Bolshevism

on Germany. Its watchword was the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it imagined this dictatorship very differently from how we had conceived of it previously. We never imagined that dictatorship in any other way than that it would be exercised through democracy. (*Dissent.*)

What had divided the original party Majority and the Independents has disappeared for the most part as a result of the Revolutionary events.

We must achieve firm, ordered conditions in Germany as soon as possible. For this we need the *Nationalversammlung*. We must have peace so that we can be economically active again. (*Interjection: The Nationalversammlung will not help us at all!*) Do you have so little trust in the power of the working class to assert its will? What use is the council republic to you then? Are the workers in Russia better off than we are? There the factories lie silent. There the proletariat does not rule, but a minority exercises its rule with the help of paid guards. (*Applause.*) The result of this is a complete backwards development of Russia in the economic sense.

Russia is taking giant steps backwards.

(*Lively unrest and dissent.*) Do you not want to hear this? Johann Jacobi said: it is the misfortune of kings that they do not wish to hear the truth.[1] (*Applause.*) If you do not want to hear the truth either, then that is a misfortune for you as well. I want to show you what our people will be brought to if these unsustainable circumstances continue, or if we should even end up in a Russian situation. Two thirds of the German workers live off industry. If things go with us as they have in Russia, then *industry will be destroyed* and these workers will lose the basis of their existence. The greatest misery will set in, and then will come reaction and

counter-revolution. We can only safeguard the Republic if we work together, shoulder to shoulder! (*Loud applause.*)

What stands in the way of working together? On the one side *questions of personalities.* But when such a great matter is at stake, can one let it be scuppered by questions of personalities? (*Many interjections: No, never.*) If parties join together, then each of them must accept the persons which the other one proposes as its trustees [*Vertrauensleute*], whatever else one may have against these persons. But substantive [*sachliche*] differences divide us as well. Yet we are united on these points: Democracy must be secured and expanded, the economy must be gradually socialised, and in the interim care must be taken to ensure that our economy does not collapse.

The *Spartakus* group *is pursuing a policy of oblivion* [*Elendspolitik*], which must lead to the disintegration of the entire German people. They hope for world revolution, and believe that they can build a beautiful new society on the rubble it will bring. That is an uncertain speculation. In France and England, we do not stand before the revolution. Even less so in the United States. (*Interjection: That will come eventually!*) The *Spartakus* people say: the war cost so many human lives and billions, why should the revolution not also require sacrifices of property and blood [*Gut und Blut*]. (*Noisy dissent. Interjection: No social democrat is for mass murder.*) Do you believe that terrorism can happen without mass murder? Either you are democrats, or you get a dictatorship like in Russia,

then you have mass murder,

where they slaughter innocents as retribution for the actions of others, as the Bolshevists have done in Russia. The logic of facts leads to such violent measures, if one does not want democracy. Whoever does not wish for violence, whoever wants to hold fast to democracy and organically develop it further, must resolve that we social democrats have to work shoulder to shoulder. The two parties cannot be melded together straightaway. Political differences must first diminish even further. But we must *join forces in the elections.* The contradictions between the two parties must be confined to factual questions, and these must be discussed democratically and in a fraternal way. If we make that our fundamental principle, then we can fight all efforts targeted against the Revolution with complete success. If we do not, then we shall have counter-revolution. If at the time Karl Marx said "Proletarians of all lands, unite", then today we cry "*Social democrats of Germany, unite*". (*Strong applause.*)

Note

1. Johann Georg Jacobi (1740–1814), German poet and publicist, contemporary and rival of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Check for updates

CHAPTER 22

Bernstein's Return to the Party

Vorwärts, 25 December 1918

Comrade Eduard Bernstein has completed his re-entry into the party, as we have already reported, with the following letter, which he addressed to the executive of our Schöneberg voters' association:

> Honoured comrade Bäumler!
>
> I have been convinced since the first day of the Revolution that only through honest collaboration between all social democrats can the new Republic of Germany be assured the healthy development it needs to keep our economic life in service, and to guarantee success and durability to far-reaching socialist measures for the benefit of the working people. I have also concluded from *yesterday's events* that the two social-democratic factions' existing relationship towards one another is only an inadequate prerequisite for such collaboration, so I find myself induced to take for my own person the first step towards a firmer alliance. Without dissolving my ties to Independent Social Democracy, *I am also registering as a member with your party*, and I request that you kindly pass this registration to the treasurer of your membership.
>
> With a socialist greeting,
>
> Schöneberg, 23 December. Eduard Bernstein.

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CHAPTER 23

The Independents' Attempt at Mediation

A Letter from Eduard Bernstein

Vorwärts, 13 January 1919

We have received the following letter:

In your special edition on Friday, the accusation is levelled at Independent Social Democracy that in its mediating activity it has played an ambiguous game in its own reprehensible separate interest. That the language of *Freiheit* and the demands of the Shop Stewards, etc., in Independent Social Democracy have been the opposite of conciliatory.

In the interest of truth, which should still prevail even in the bitterest of all struggles, namely in fraternal war, and so that the inevitable contests of opinion are conducted as factually as possible, I want to make clear the following in response to that:

The mediating action the special edition is writing about is the result of a meeting between members of the party leadership of Independent Social Democracy and a number of former parliamentary and literary representatives of the party, among them my humble self as well. In this meeting, we only discussed the question of what stance we should take towards the fighting that has broken out, and how we should behave in it. And we came to the *unanimous* decision that those present had to make their best efforts to prevent the proletarians of Berlin from massacring one another, whereupon part of those who were there then took on the task of negotiating with the *Volksbeauftragte* in the interest of reaching a settlement, and another part promised to do the same with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, etc. Not even the *slightest trace of the idea* of any intention of

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squeezing out any capital for Independent Social Democracy from this action or through this action *was contemplated* whatsoever. Only one thought preoccupied those who took part: what *responsibility* did Independent Social Democracy have in this situation?

If a different opinion prevailed among influential representatives of the Berlin membership of the USPD than among the participants of that conference, and if this was reflected in the columns of *Freiheit*, which is the organ of the Berliners, then one may judge this difference of opinions—which is certainly not the only one in the history of our parties—substantively however one wishes. The accusation of dishonesty or ambiguity cannot be inferred against either of the two tendencies.

Berlin, 11 January 1919.

With a social-democratic greeting,
Ed. Bernstein.

Check for updates

CHAPTER 24

On the Question of Unity

Vorwärts, 13 February 1919

> We are happy to publish the following contribution by comrade Eduard *Bernstein* on the question of unity, but cannot, so long as a solution has not been found to relieve it, abandon the most determined struggle against the *disastrous policy of the Independents*.—Editors of *Vorwärts*

In the first instance, it is not the distressing stirring of emotions, which the prevailing party strife [*Parteihader*] has called forth in the breast of the great mass of social-democratically-minded workers, nor too a calculated assessment of the wasted working capacity and the loss of electoral constituencies it has as a result, that let the reunification of Social Democracy appear as the pressing order of the day. No, *bitter political necessity* speaks loudly in favour of pursuing this object energetically. Nobody who retrospectively scrutinises again the events that have taken place since the November Days of 1918 in our young German Republic can fail to recognise that many highly unwelcome things would *not* have happened—and many things that regrettably remained undone would have come about—if the days of the Revolution had found German Social Democracy a united party.

Much blood would then not have been spilled, many great works would not have been destroyed, and the German economy could have remained shielded from some of the great damage it has now suffered. United in itself, Social Democracy could have spoken with much more convincing

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force to those elements among the workers who had slipped into *wrong ways of thinking* through the corrosive influences of the war, and could have had a much more sustained influence on them and thus *deterred* them from taking *misguided steps* than happened in the end.

Further, it would have required much stronger recognition of the powers hostile to the Revolution, and would have drawn those who were still vacillating or still undecided far more into the aura of its ideas, and kept them firmly there, than we have seen. It would have found the way free for creative activity on a grand scale, and without detrimental effects for the economic life of the nation.

But today, we are not concerned with what lies behind us. Memory only shows what dangers we are heading towards if the party quarrel [*Parteizwist*] in Social Democracy continues and possibly intensifies still further, which its continuation would have as a well-nigh necessary consequence. The Republic of Germany is not nearly out of the woods yet as far as its capacity to exist [*Daseinsfähigkeit*] is concerned. Tremendous problems still lie before it that must be overcome. The question of the *constitution*, which lies before the *Nationalversammlung*, plays by no means the main part in this process. The most important things are to bring about conditions in *economic life* of a kind that industry no longer operates at a loss, as is happening in most cases today, and Germany again has production that constantly increases national prosperity. *Without this, even the furthest-reaching socialisation would be worse than worthless.* But this can only be realised without damaging disruptions—under which the proletariat would ultimately suffer the most—through the collaboration of all social democrats. For it requires, as I have already indicated before, the unreserved trust of the working class in the honesty, capability, and coherence of Social Democracy.

Continuing the party strife can, by contrast, only have the effect of completely shaking this trust, which in many circles has already suffered so much. In addition to economic necessity, a no less important factor is the need to meet the menacing danger of a resurgence of *militarism* in good time. Let us not deceive ourselves: the spirit of this ominous force, which we thought we had finally defeated in the November Days of 1918, is about yet again. Whatever individual persons may have contributed to breathing new life into it through their *faux-pas*—and such *faux-pas* can be found on *both* sides—the main cause is the division within Social Democracy. If this division endures, one can assume with mathematical certainty that those events will *repeat* themselves—and probably

even repeat themselves on an ever larger scale—with the natural consequence of intervention by armed force. A divided Social Democracy will not have the strength to nip this evil right in the bud and stamp it out. It will lodge firm, and the *danger of a military reaction*, which could hitherto be described as an exaggeration, will one day become a reality. Only if Social Democracy confronts it as a united force can it prevent the return of militarism into its old position.

There are still more reasons which make the unification of Social Democracy a necessity. I do not want to go into them as well here, since I would rather turn to saying a few words about the other question to be discussed today, namely the question of whether *unification is even possible*.

I do not hesitate to answer *yes*. What was necessary has always been and must be possible. Certainly, the disparities of opinion that obtain among the parties of Social Democracy are of a very heavy kind; they come right down to the deepest, most fundamental ideas of socialist doctrine. They will also hence not disappear from the world today or tomorrow. But there have likewise been such disparities of opinion in previous years, and they have often led to quite fierce clashes of minds. However, in the moments where what mattered was to be practical, they have not prevented people who fought each other bitterly before from joining forces without hesitation for a common struggle. Faced with the party's programme of action, as the necessities of the moment dictated it, we let theoretical disputes recede into the background. What was possible when it was only a matter of elections must be possible where so many greater things are at stake. It is *not* impossible to agree guidelines for the policy to abide by today, and an appropriate programme of action, which all who are rooted in the fundamental principles and demands of the Erfurt Programme of German Social Democracy can sign up to.

The question of personalities [*Personenfrage*] too should not stand in the way of unification. A satisfactory resolution of the question of personalities must be found, one that does not leave any bitterness behind. But it does not have to precede unification: it will in any case be a *consequence* of reunification. Both of the social-democratic voter associations [*Wahlvereine*] in Tegel emphasised this as well when they appointed a unification commission, and restricted themselves to setting down basic guidelines for a factual unification programme.

It is all of our task to work in this vein. Let us fill ourselves entirely with this thought. Let us carry it into the widest circles of the working class, and let us not rest until it has been realised.

Away with the arguments about personalities! Away with everything that poisons the struggle of opinions between social democrats, that lets the socialist see any socialist who thinks differently as his enemy! Up the work for joining together all social democrats for the common struggle to *consolidate our democratic achievements* and the *socialist expansion of the new German Republic*!

CHAPTER 25

Auf Wiedersehen!

A Word of Farewell to Independent Social Democracy

Vorwärts, 21–22 March 1919; *Freiheit*, 22 March 1919

At the party conference of Independent Social Democracy held just recently, a proposal was accepted under which none of its members may be members of another party at the same time. This resolution, which would make sense if there were only *one* social-democratic party in Germany, is testament to a limited understanding of the effects of the fact that Germany has *two* social-democratic parties, neither of which can say that it, to follow the poet,

> in its hands alone
> bears the scales of all that is right.[1]

Neither of Germany's two social-democratic parties—the communists' party, as is well known, refuses to describe itself as social-democratic—can claim that in all respects it is the sole correct interpreter of the social-democratic idea, and the infallible representative of policy corresponding to it.

In the opinion of very many people, the social-democratic Majority faction *fundamentally gets it right*: even though, in view of Germany's economic-social structure and political situation, it has made consolidating it as a socialistically-oriented democratic republic the main plank of its policy for now, it has made *all kinds of mistakes* in carrying through this policy. Then again, while Independent Social Democracy is right in its

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criticism of the Majority party on individual questions, for its part, it is pursuing a *policy of negation and disintegration* at a time where consolidating the Republic depends so infinitely much on constructive collaboration by Social Democracy—which threatens to bring far worse, far more ominous effects in its wake than all the mistakes of the Majority socialists put together. No higher principle, no special perspective on society divides them from the others, and hence the resolution mentioned above is also not a sign of greater inner strength and intellectual superiority, but rather only a sign that those who adopted it see fertile soil for their strength in the deplorable party dispute.

The resolution is directed—admittedly not exclusively, but still primarily—personally at the author of this piece, because I was guilty of the crime of giving the signal to put aside the party dispute by registering as a member of its sister party. The malicious comments that were spread about me for taking this step prompt me to make the following observations:

1. On 1 December 1914, an improvised meeting took place in the party room [*Fraktionszimmer*] of the then-still-unified Reichstag group of Social Democracy among party members who were partly opponents of the authorisation of war credits, and partly wanted to see this authorisation tied to the release of a specific declaration. Regarding a ruse that was apparently being planned by the supporters of authorisation, here for the first time it was discussed whether we should not shy away from a split if necessary. This prompted me to speak up, saying that although I would stand up for the demand of the gathered members with all the energy I could muster, *I would not be amenable to a split*. When I was still a young party member, I added, I took part in the fraternal struggle between Lassalleans and Eisenachers, and after four decades of party activity, I do not want any part in the same thing again at any price. But the ruse never happened, and so the ominous cloud also passed for the time being.
2. On 24 March 1916, the faction members of the Haase-Geyer-Ledebour group, who had been deprived of their rights as party members by the resolution of the party majority, formed their own party by the name of the Social-Democratic Working Group [*Sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*]. I joined this party as a protest against the measure, but only after I had been assured that

the formation of this separate party would *only be a temporary measure* and should *not* lead to a split in the party. The latter was then also included explicitly in the statement that the Working Group issued at the time.

3. At Easter 1917, the conference of social-democratic opposition groups assembled at Gotha was *surprised* on the second session day by a *proposal to form its own political party after all.* I fought against this proposal immediately, and voted *against* it with *Kautsky* and others. We were outvoted at the time by some 70 participants to 44, and since I did not want to leave the old social-democratic membership of my place of residence in Schöneberg—to which I had belonged for 15 years and which was very low on strength at the time—in the lurch, I was forced to submit to the resolution, since returning to the Majority faction had become impossible for me for political reasons. Despite all that, as deep as I felt the political contradiction to be, I deliberately refused to follow others' example and call our previous comrades-in-arms "gentlemen" [*Herren*] in speech or writing.
4. In Spring 1918 in Berlin, a convivial gathering took place in the rooms of the Bolshevik *Russian embassy* involving members of this party and supporters of Independent Social Democracy, to which I was also invited, even though I had made no secret of my opposition to Bolshevist policy. *Among other things, they discussed the reasons why Independent Social Democracy was not proceeding as revolutionarily as the Bolshevists demanded*, and in the debate about this, Georg Ledebour commented that the party was regrettably composed in quite a different way than the Bolshevists thought. "There are even some people among us", he said *verbatim*, "who cannot reunite fast enough with … Ebert, Scheidemann, and their ilk." When I spoke, I replied: "Ledebour has named no names, but anyone who is well-informed knows that his last remark is directed against me. I can only answer that so long as the Majority faction holds fast to their policy of authorising war credits, returning to it is flatly impossible for me. On the other hand, I do not hesitate to declare *that despite this I will not rule out the idea of reunifying with German Social Democracy in future. And when the time for that comes, as far as I am concerned, I will not let reunification founder on questions of personalities.*"

I think that these observations, whose strict accuracy no one who participated in those meetings will question, will now suffice to dispel any uncertainty about the motives of my behaviour.

* * *

The events of October and November 1918 brought about the time I yearned for. The circumstances under which the German Revolution took place urgently demanded a *rapprochement* between Germany's social democrats. This had further been made possible by the fact that the leaders of the Majority faction had, after quite some dithering, already drawn the right conclusions from the news about the state of things on the battlefield, had energetically demanded and compelled the resignation of the representatives of the old system, and on 9 November—when the victory of the Revolution was assured—had made Independent Social Democracy the offer of entering the provisional government of the Republic on the basis of full parity. Wanting to continue the party dispute now would have been *absolute madness*. That Independent Social Democracy was nowhere near strong enough to take over the government by itself was no secret to any of its leading representatives. And any of its members whom partisan hatred [*Parteihaß*] had not robbed of any sense for political necessities had to tell himself that it could not refuse that offer. After long, very long deliberation, the faction decided to accept the proposal. The *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* was formed out of three Majorityists and three Independents, collaboration began, and even though it went sluggishly at first, it went ahead all the same. For a while, one could hope that, in order to heal the German working class, real unification might emerge from this merely formal one.

Why things turned out differently, and whose grubby work is to blame for them doing so, shall not be examined here. It is enough that the enemies of unification have achieved their goal for the moment—the two factions are hostile towards each other yet again, and with greater embitterment than before. To whose benefit? Not to the benefit of the German working class, which as a result does not achieve the security in economic life that is so necessary for its prosperity. Only *misery-politicians* and *misery-speculators* benefit from this—those who hope to fulfil their plans and realise their speculations through general misery. The oh-so-learned German *students of Bolshevism* speculate on misery, yet they have learned oh-so-little that they imagine they can build a paradise out of ruins. But political reaction is no less alert to misery, as it knows from experience how to make such situations work for it. In the Revolution, the division of

Social Democracy has had the natural consequence that both factions fall into ever greater dependency—the Majority faction, which is in government, on its neighbours to the right, the Independents on the *Spartacists*, to whom they make ever greater concessions in a direction that, as their socialist knowledge and conscience must tell the experienced among them, threatens to lead to the *complete destruction of our people's living conditions*.

Under these circumstances, I cannot even regret the resolution of the Independents' party congress, so far as it concerns me personally. From the observations above, which I could still add to considerably, one can see how difficult I found the separation from my old party, despite my decided opposition to its policy, and that I did not undertake it voluntarily at all. But after the separation was a done deal, as Haase and his comrades will surely confirm, I did my duty in Independent Social Democracy to the best of my strengths, and so it would likewise now be difficult for me to voluntarily part with comrades with whom I have kept up a loyal camaraderie under the most difficult conditions. But if today, where everything depends on *helping the Republic survive this frightful crisis*, which it has to overcome, they fight against it in the same way as they did previously against imperial rule founded on militarism, if they claim to reject the practice of the *Spartakus* party but take on ever more of the phraseology of Spartacism, so that recently in the *Nationalversammlung* their member Kurt *Rosenfeld* could say in the name of the party "We are on the side of the council system"—if, therefore, instead of working to clarify the political struggle of Social Democracy, which is more necessary than ever today, they cause *ruinous confusion* in the minds of those parts of the working class accessible to them, which can only favour the Spartacists, who are at least logical in their *selling-out of the democratic programme* of Social Democracy; if, by carrying out such groundwork for the party that seeks to undermine the organic development of the Republic at any price, it simultaneously eases the task of influencing the bourgeois classes in the city and the countryside in favour of reactionary counter-revolution, then there can be no more talk of comradely collaboration with them, certainly not on my part. I am enough of a party man to subordinate myself to the resolutions of the majority of my comrades-in-arms on individual questions. But silently going along with a policy that I consider *quintessentially perverse and ruinous*—that I cannot do.

So the resolution of the party congress of Independent Social Democracy leaves me no other choice than to give up my membership of it, and to dedicate my services as a party man exclusively to the *party of the*

Majority socialists, whose policy I consider open to criticism on individual matters, but which in its basic idea—which is what it comes down to—I think is the one that serves the interests of the German proletariat best.

Since I am thereby bowing out as a party man of Independent Social Democracy, I cannot avoid expressing the hope that the day will come where I can again shake the hand, if not of all, then still of the great majority of its members in a *united* Social Democracy. It is unthinkable that the party will be able to keep to its current policy of swinging between Spartacism and democratic socialism much longer. In the long run, it must decide on one of the two; either to fully depart from the traditional policy of German Social Democracy, or to radically make an end with Spartacism's senseless playing with fire. No one who understands anything about the conditions of modern economic life can deceive themselves that the latter—i.e., the policy of continued revolts and strikes with the aim of suppressing the democratic parliaments through an almighty soviet regime—is geared in Germany towards a bloody civil war and the ruin of the economy, along with long-lasting unemployment for millions of industrial workers. Even if everything for which the Independents criticise the Majority socialists' policy comes about, this would still be a lesser evil compared with the former's games. By contrast, it is unarguable that a number of its truly inherent deficiencies are simply the fault of the party division, and that *only a united Social Democracy can protect the German people from devastating convulsions* and ensure constant social advances for the German working class.

Filled with this realisation, I will continue to work for this unification among the working class, undeterred by the fact that at the moment, partisan hatred is far too great on either side to bear immediate success. The mission of the association *Unity of Social Democracy* [*Einigkeit der Sozialdemokratie*], which I co-founded, is in the first instance *educational work* and the creation of an *intellectual home* for the growing number of those workers whom the party strife repulses to their core, and who still do not want to give up their faith in the cause of socialism. But to the extent that it gains strength, this movement can have enough of an effect on the disputing parties to reduce substantive differences and thereby pave the way for unification. A thought that makes it possible for me to part from my erstwhile comrades-in-arms by saying *Auf Wiedersehen*.

Note

1. It is not clear from which source Bernstein has drawn the fragment of poetry he cites here.

Check for updates

CHAPTER 26

Lassalle and Bolshevism

Vorwärts, 31 August 1919[1]

When I wrote the final sentences of this essay fifteen years ago, no one could have predicted that a time would come again where socialists declared the democratic franchise—which Lassalle commended to workers as their fundamental social principle—unsuitable for the social emancipation of the proletariat, and would throw it onto the scrapheap in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat exercised exclusively by councils of workers, employees, etc. After all, with German workers taking advantage of it systematically since 1866, it had exerted its social force so much that not only socialists in one country after another made it their mission to campaign for it and make use of it, but also the authors of the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who were originally cool towards it, retreated so much from this disdain that they held the successes won by German workers off the back of it in ever higher regard. Ultimately, on the eve of his death, Engels expressed the view in his preface to Marx's essay on *The Class Struggles in France* that the German workers had grasped how to transform the franchise from a means of swindling [*Prellerei*] into one of emancipation.

It is also generally known—and was admitted publicly by Bismarck—that, among other things, the German workers' insurance, which was for many long years the most advanced legislation of its kind, could not have been pushed through without the parliamentary activity of Social Democracy, which itself again had the systematic use of the franchise as its

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foundation. From election to election, both the political as well as the general social influence of Social Democracy rose despite all the obstacles the military state placed in its way, and the helplessness of the powers of reaction [*Reaktionsmächte*] in the face of this voting system grew.

But now people have come along who say that all of this is inconclusive, and who declare that the dictatorship of workers' councils proclaimed by one wing of the Russian socialists—the Bolshevists—is the sole effective means of emancipating the proletariat. Although, according to Marx (Preface to *Capital*), the backward country is supposed to learn from the advanced country, the advanced countries of western Europe are now supposed to adopt methods of social-political action from the still substantially backward countries of eastern Europe.

I do not consider it fitting to level criticism in this piece, which is dedicated to socialist propaganda, against the practices the Bolshevists are pursuing in Russia and Hungary. Experience can do that. Here, we are dealing with theoretical consideration of the new doctrine. But one need only ask oneself what reasons, what requirements could have caused the aforementioned tendency among the Russian socialists to discard the general franchise, to realise that behind this stance lies nothing other than a selling-out of the most significant element of the scientific social theory devised by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This doctrine conceives advanced human society as an organism subject to certain laws of development, which cannot be reshaped at will into a desired form, but rather can only be developed further into a specific new form after undergoing changes in the foundations of its life process. In modern bourgeois society, the precondition is that of attaining a high maturity of the capitalist mode of production, and of the modern proletariat developed by it. There is a causal relationship there. To the extent that capitalist development goes ahead, the proletariat grows in number and social significance, and in this way eventually becomes the class in society to whom falls both the mission and the power to lead it from its capitalist into its socialist form.

To the extent that this maturity is reached, the general franchise will and must raise the political power of the working class and ensure that its worldview [*Ideenwelt*] has decisive influence over all areas of public life. Conversely, of course, the more backward a country is in its economic development, the less the general franchise can guarantee the political rule of the proletariat. In line with this verdict, which they arrived at more or less emotionally, socialists in western countries have previously taken rather a negative stance towards it, if they did not directly reject it. And

ultimately it is the same consciousness that has driven the Bolshevists to abjure the general franchise indefinitely and replace it with class representation [*Klassenvertretung*] to which not even the entire proletariat is admitted, but rather only select parts or groups of the population. In substance, they thereby recognise that Russia's social development is not yet at all advanced enough to realise a socialist society.

Now, they want to hothouse this development to the required level through incisive interventions. But in this they are forced, in contrast to Marx's doctrine, to resort to inventing artificial means, instead of discovering the necessary measures of socialist policy in the real needs of social life and the emancipatory struggle of the workers. They necessarily lapse back into the speculative method of pre-Marxist socialism. And there, things have gone similarly with them in economic policy as with Lassalle. He fell into contradictions because he took up the plan for producer cooperatives [*Produktivgenossenschaften*] working with state credit in the way it had been formulated by the socialists of the 1840s, who were still half-stuck in utopianism. The council system in the economy, as the Bolshevists first proclaimed it, bore a strong internal affinity to this plan for producer cooperatives. "The workers, masters of the factory", was the phrase here, just as there it had been: "The workers' estate, its own entrepreneur". Only Lassalle was more logical than the Bolshevists. Because he wanted to grant workers the rights and advantages of the businessman, he also combined them with a transfer of his economic responsibilities. He did not take the insane step of separating rights and responsibilities. And we know from his letters to Rodbertus how very conscious he was that the producer cooperative was not socialism yet at all. In practical politics, he emphasised the struggle for the general franchise, and impressed on workers that only once this had been won, and only once they had attained appropriate representation in the parliament, would the time have come to take extensive counsel as to the most effective way to realise this idea. In this way, he at least fundamentally rescued the plan from utopianism: he saw in the franchise the guarantee of organic proceeding. The Bolshevists reject the franchise because the organic path of development does not fit into their policy. But the logic of things is stronger than all rulers' might. Where this contradicts the laws of development, it can well destroy, but it cannot serve progress in a consistent way. And that is the case with the Bolshevists. Their economic and social policy is a web of screaming contradictions: the most sweeping social idealism alongside downright oriental despotism.

Unless a *volte-face* takes place in good time, that can only lead to a completely monstrous miscarriage.

Already now, Bolshevism's main strength is a militarism that recalls the former janissary economy in Turkey. The bureaucratic apparatus is likewise growing beyond measure. Parasitism is rising, and not falling; on the contrary, what is falling is production and with it the people's prosperity. The opposite of what socialism wants is occurring, precisely as the necessary consequence of their entirely disorganised treatment of the economic problem. To the quite un-Marxist conception of the historical function of the business class corresponds the Bolshevists' proclaimed exclusion of businessmen from the franchise. The franchise should not be general, so that businessmen cannot vote as well. A measure that could only make sense where businessmen are still so numerous that their voices would be enough to give the country a parliament that served its class interests. But this would be the surest sign of the country's immaturity for socialist transformation. The class franchise [*Klassenwahlrecht*], whichever form it is established in, leads to the narrowing of voters' intellectual horizons, and stands in contradiction to the significant achievements of the great French Revolution. And comprehending this Revolution in its full depth was one of Ferdinand Lassalle's distinguishing qualities.

Note

1. [*Vorwärts*—We have taken this article from a work that has appeared with the Verlag der Buchhandlung Vorwärts in Berlin: *Ferdinand Lassalle and his Significance for the Working Class*. A memoir to mark the anniversary of his death by *Eduard Bernstein*. Price 8 marks.]

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CHAPTER 27

The Timescale of the Revolution

Vorwärts, 30 December 1919

Prompted by Gustav Mayer's wonderful Engels biography, I lately took the opportunity to reread some of the letters that I received from Engels over the years.[1] In one of them, I came across a passage that it seems quite timely to repeat. It is in a letter from July 1888 and goes like this:

> … the *great mistake* among the Germans is that they imagine revolution as **something to be settled overnight**. In fact it is *a process of development* of the masses *over many years* under expediting conditions. Every revolution that was settled overnight only eliminated a reaction that was hopeless from the start (1830) or **led immediately to the opposite of what was aimed for (1848 France)**.

How much we see the truth laid down in these words—seemingly so outmoded—again proving true in our times! How much it shows itself in the most varied countries that revolution too is an *organic process*, which is bound to certain laws of development and hence can well be hastened, but *not shortened at will*, without bringing about the "opposite" of what was aimed for! Wherever people lost sight of this insight, it did not happen without *reaction setting in* soon after, here merely as brutal terror, there as a creeping sickness of the societal body that brings about anarchic conditions, and often has *the greatest misery* as a result.

They say of Nicholas I of Russia that, when the railways were invented and the council of state debated the question of which way a rail line

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connecting two important places should go, he drew a straight line between the two with a ruler on the map and declared categorically: "That is the shortest way, and it will go like this." As a result of this, the construction of the line, since it led over many miles of extensive marshes and then again over mountainous ground, and made necessary a large number of large bridge-constructions, incurred many times the costs that would have been required with a sensible elaboration of the construction plan on the basis of proper choices of route. Regardless of whether this really took place, the history of absolutist despotisms is full of such preposterous decrees, which led to terrible sacrifices of human happiness and life. But revolutionaries or revolutionary parties that defy the necessities of their given economic life and the nature of the human material they have available, under the illusion that all that counts is to change the world with a flick of the wrist, *do not act any differently to those despots*, and with the same outcomes. With some of the dictatorial decrees with which Lenin, Trotsky, and their comrades announced their rule, I had to think involuntarily of that reported diktat by their compatriot Nicholas I. The same spirit shone out of them, and how much popular prosperity have they cost? Of course, that is not to make the case for passive *laissez-aller* [*Gehenlassen*] or feeble fear of taking drastic measures. For Social Democracy as the party of the new socialist formation of society, it behoves always to bear in mind Sallet's beautiful verse:

> You say to us: "Youth with blood that runs too hot,
> Give up your rapturous dreams of freedom,
> Good things only emerge historically."
> Fine! But where nothing happens, is that history?[2]

Yet at the same time, one should not imagine that to undertake a lot also means accomplishing a lot, and that a law must *sound* radical in order to have radical *effects*.

Our Independents vie with the Communists in their disparaging judgments about the *Works Councils Act* devised by the Majority coalition in the *Nationalversammlung*.[3] Now certainly I do not dispute that the law has its *deficiencies*, seen from the side of workers. But it is, like every product of the coalition, a work of compromise, but not therefore already evil by any stretch. For if the Majority socialists have conceded to the bourgeois on some points, so have these to the socialists in other questions. Yes, the whole law, as barely radical as it seems, is a *significant concession* by

the bourgeois to the socialist conception of law and to that extent a piece of social revolution. It carries in itself *the seed of further fertile social development*, and must hence be endorsed by every socialist who does not place their party spirit [*Parteigeist*] as master over their social conscience.

Notes

1. Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels: Eine Biographie*, vol. 1: *Friedrich Engels in seiner Frühzeit*; vol. 2: *Engels und der Aufstieg der Arbeiterbewegung in Europa* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934 [1920]).
2. Friedrich von Sallet, *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Breslau: Verlag August Schulz, 1845), p. 413.
3. The 1920 Works Councils Law (*Betriebsrätegesetz*) introduced a legal obligation for enterprises with over 20 employees to permit the election of works councils. The law met with considerable resistance from workers, who resented the omission of co-determination right for business employees, and from business-owners, who classed any supervisory role for workers as an infringement of business secrets. Despite a massive protest by USPD and KPD in January 1920, which was brutally put down by Prussian police, the law was passed in February 1920 and remained in effect until it was suspended in January 1934 under Nazi rule.

CHAPTER 28

An Easter of Hope

Vorwärts, 4 April 1920

Even if we cannot speak of a happy Easter, since so much hardship and misery abounds, and since the *coup de main* of the military camarilla and the brutal shootings that followed it have put so many families into mourning, Social Democracy may still celebrate the feast of Easter this time with the rising consciousness that we have taken a large stride forwards in the *consolidation and expansion of the German Republic*.

The material damage which the assault of 13 March caused to German economic life is enormous, and cannot yet even be gauged in its entirety.[1] The Lüttwitzes and their co-conspirators seek to offload the responsibility for this by saying that they had not in fact wanted to disturb economic life in any way, but rather give it greater security. Quite the opposite, it was the fault of those who proclaimed the quite unnecessary general strike. But that is the argument of *the burglar*, who shifts the blame when his intrusion leads to bloodshed onto the residents of the house he has broken into. The general strike was so clearly the working class's natural answer to the *generals' coup de main* that it would have broken out even if no call for it had gone out from any central office. Nothing proves this more strikingly than the fact that in very many places workers immediately laid down their work as soon as news reached them about the *coup de main*, without any such appeal reaching them as well.

Indeed, it would signify a thorough ignorance about the soul of the German worker if any of the *coup* participants had in all seriousness

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imagined that he would passively accept the *coup d'état* and placidly await what would now develop from it. The mass of the German workers is fortunately not yet made of such weak stuff. That is pretty much generally known, and those around Lüttwitz surely knew it too. No, they *had* to be prepared and were prepared to meet resistance among the workers. What they were not prepared for, and what therefore truly surprised them, was the tremendous unanimity of this resistance, and the lightning-speed with which it spread.

The *coup* would have provoked strikes, unrest, and uprisings in any case, and these would have had just as disruptive an effect on business life as the general strike. Indeed, they would have been even more disruptive still, since if they had remained independent of one another, they would have dragged on even longer, and thus significantly prolonged this uncertainty. Anyone tolerably capable of judgment could have told themselves that, and it was already said and written months ago that any attempt at violent reaction in Germany would lead to *anarchy*. A working class raised over a period of decades to consciousness of its political task will not allow itself to be subjected to the rule of the sword [*Säbelherrschaft*] without resistance, and led astray by mellifluous assurances about the true purposes of attempted military rule.

With all that, the speed with which the working class and—let us admit—also a considerable part of the democratically-minded rest of the population recognised the danger and banded together intellectually to offer immediate resistance was something magnificent, and in its universality was able to surprise even people who were in the habit of placing their trust in the democratic spirit of the working classes.

After all, a great *political frustration* was gaining ground. All the world was dissatisfied, and a habit had set in of holding the Republic responsible for all manner of ills, and little had happened to effectively counteract this mood and this practice. Although the present German *Nationalversammlung* can barely be compared with the parliament that represented the nation in France in 1851, which was overwhelmingly made up of farmers and gentry [*Landjunkern*], still among the general public a mood was growing towards it that was frighteningly similar to the one that *made possible Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état*. The Erzberger tax laws had made it countless enemies, the Junkers hated it in their very soul, and in the world of academic professions it was generally fashionable to mock it and the government of the Republic. And from the other side,

from the Independents and Communists, it was portrayed to the workers in a way that at least had to inspire among them the same ambivalence towards the Republic and the *Nationalversammlung* as the majority of Paris workers showed when Bonaparte forcibly dissolved the chamber on 2 December 1851 and had the opposition members taken to Mazas prison in police coaches.

Evidently the Kapp-Lüttwitzes counted on things going similarly here. Many of their preparations are the spitting image of those the generals and political adventurers backing Louis Bonaparte had laid on the eve of their *coup d'état*. The history of the *coup d'état* of 1851 is better known in these circles than it usually is by us among the people, and it offers so many parallels with events over here. Certainly, we have had *no June Days*, but despite that even their hero Cavaignac could not have been more hated among the Paris workers in those days than Gustav Noske regrettably is now among a great part of the Berlin workers. And was it to be expected of workers who only read *Freiheit* or *Rote Fahne* that they might inflict any sacrifices whatsoever on themselves to save the democratic Republic?

Yet history never repeats itself under quite the same conditions, and the parallels are contrasted with prodigious differences that the godfathers of the Kapp-Lüttwitz enterprise overlooked. For his part, Louis Bonaparte had the Napoleonic legend, transfigured by Romanticism, but what could they serve up to the people's imagination? Perhaps the legend of the *hero in Amerongen*?[2] They did not dare allude to him, even indirectly. And what was the worst, what broke the neck of their enterprise, is that they had to deal with a people that was thoroughly sick of war, a people that sees its worst enemy in everything that looks like militarism. To the French of 1851, after years of restored Bourbon rule and bourgeois monarchy, the first Napoleon's wars could appear in a Romantic light. For the Germans of 1920, above all for the German workers, *there is no more Romanticism any more as far as war is concerned*. By contrast, it was precisely the militaristic aspect of the enterprise that provoked the workers to their most strident opposition. It was this that brought together Independents and Majorityists, which then also moved the Communists to join with them. In militarism they all see the greater foe, and that is why they found themselves fighting it together.

Would there be any point in arguing retrospectively about their motivations? It is enough to observe them, and incidentally to be happy that we fought together at all.

After all, only through a struggle waged in concert could a situation be achieved where the working class emerged with increased political influence.

In light of the terrible objective difficulties with which the German Republic has to contend, regardless of which party or class it is led by, we do not want to overestimate any political success. But we also do not need to dispute it away.

The days from 13 to 18 March 1920 represent the second great date of the present German Revolution.

What we plucked as a ripe fruit on 9 November 1918 was won in these March days of 1920. And at the head of the victors stands the socialist German working class.

The programme of nine demands agreed and undersigned in the night from 19 to 20 March settles this fact in documentary form. Let some people or others quibble over the details. The value of the whole thing as a signpost for the direction of politics in the Republic is not diminished by that at all.

That the Republic was won and this programme attained are successes which the German working class and German Social Democracy can look back on with satisfaction at this feast of Easter, and with which it can raise its spirits.

And secondly, alongside this, we celebrate the *rapprochement* reached between the social-democratic parties. We do not want to overestimate this either. After all, we see in the refusal of the Independents to enter a coalition government, and to grasp the coalition's political necessity for the healthy development of the Republic, what significant fundamental differences of opinion still exist between the two factions of social democrats.

But we have come closer together. *We no longer look upon each other with the eyes of deadly enemies.* We have started to forge agreements with one another for particular purposes. That is already great progress. That is an achievement of this struggle, which justifies the best hopes for the struggles that lie ahead of us. For great struggles do still lie ahead. We have won a great victory, but we have not yet won *the* victory. Our enemies still hold great trumps. Let us not underestimate their power! Let us not underestimate what it means to have such a great part of the academic elite of the nation against us, as is in fact the case. Let us also not underestimate the difficulties that lie in the things with which we have to contend! They are much greater than most among us imagine. There are enormous tasks

to be solved. They are impossible to solve if Social Democracy opposes itself, divided into two hostile camps, with one faction seeking to thwart, to destroy what the other one is labouring to create. But they will become solvable to the extent that the hostile brethren approach one another more closely, learn to understand one another, and see their task, if they cannot unify for joint political work, then at least in *complementing* one another.

Thirdly, what we can be happy about at Easter 1920 might be called the great *political clarification* that has resulted from the Kapp-Lüttwitzes' *coup de main*. It should be so highly appreciated that one can almost say that it outweighs the material loss that the criminal *coup* caused to the German economy. These gentlemen were indeed this time

> A part of that power,
> Which is ever willing evil and ever producing good.[3]

In many circles, people's eyes have been opened. They have become conscious *that the democratic Republic is no irrelevant matter*. They have learned to appreciate and value it. They now know better how to distinguish between friend and enemy. They now know what to expect if the occasion arises again. Political life can only gain from that. The worst thing for the great mass of the people is general vagueness of thought and judgment. What it needs is clear sight. And that has been made possible in the political domain by Lüttwitz, Kapp, and their *coup de main*, and by the brutality of the military that sided with them. They have cleared the air of the fog that had gathered before.

Raised by the consciousness of having survived a great struggle victorious, strengthened by the sure feeling that new struggles will find them united with their class comrades beyond the bounds of party, the socialist working class thus faces the future amidst a clear political atmosphere of confidence and courage. The feast of Easter 1920 is for them a feast of joy and hope.

Notes

1. The Kapp-Lüttwitz *putsch* of 13 March 1920 was an attempted counter-revolutionary *coup d'état* against the Weimar Republic, led by General Walther von Lüttwitz and the national-conservative official Wolfgang Kapp. It was supported by currently serving and former members of the *Heer* and

Marine, in particular *Freikorps* units such as the *Marine-Brigade Ehrhardt*. It ultimately failed due to disunity and indecision among the *putschists*, but especially the general strike and armed workers' resistance called for unanimously by the leaderships of the SPD, USPD, KPD, and trade unions. After the *putsch*, many of its members reconstituted themselves into clandestine anti-republican terrorist groups, such as the infamous *Organisation Consul*, which was responsible for several high-profile assassinations during the Weimar period, including Walther Rathenau and Matthias Erzberger.

2. Amerongen Castle, refuge of Wilhelm II when he fled into exile.
3. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Abraham Hayward (tr.) (London: Hutchinson, 1908), p. 41.

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CHAPTER 29

Eduard Bernstein Against the USPD

The Significance of the Fundamental Struggle

Vorwärts, 7 May 1920

In the last few days, comrade Eduard *Bernstein* set out in a detailed letter to our party comrades in Breslau why he chose the candidacy in Teltow-Beeskow over the one he was also offered in Breslau. In Berlin, because of the comparative strength of the Independents, the campaign would be harder than in Breslau. He then goes on to say *verbatim*:

> The Independents also have it so dreadfully easy in the campaign because, instead of assisting positively in the Republic's construction and consolidation, they have chosen **the comfortable role of the external critic**, who can keep himself free of blame just as easily as someone who does not get his clothes dirty, **who stays far away from rough work.** And the construction and expansion of the Republic is, in view of the awful difficulties with which it must struggle, *quite hard and often rough work.*
>
> **But exactly that is why it is of such great importance that our party, which has taken this work upon itself, enters the new Reichstag with its strength as undiminished as possible.** After the leadership of the Independent party has roundly refused to engage with the leadership of our party about an understanding in the interest of forming a *unity front* [*Einheitsfront*], we are *compelled to compete with them for every constituency that is not totally safe*. Recognising that the enemy threat lies on the right must not obscure this fact from us. **One must only imagine what would become of the legislation and administration of the Republic if Independents and the right together won a majority in the Reichstag,**

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> **and one will grasp** that—at least as strongly as our party's natural interest in asserting itself—the great general interest of the Republic, its political cohesion, and its economic and social development require **that the Social-Democratic Party of Germany remains the strongest party in the German parliament.** The Independents' policy is today almost exclusively *a politics of demonstration* [*Demonstrationspolitik*], and on top of that mostly a *negating* politics of demonstration. **Our party's policy, however, is the politics of construction [*Aufbaupolitik*], it is the policy of positive creation.** And if the Republic does not have that, if no strong party that relinquishes its interest in provocative opposition stands behind it as its unshakeable buttress, **then Germany will perish of internal disintegration** and our people will become completely immiserated.
>
> Hence, as much as we want to take care to wage the struggle to the left *with as much objectivity as possible*, we still cannot deny that, given the state of things, *this struggle too* is necessary. **It is a contest between two principles and methods of socialist politics, and an endless amount depends on the outcome of this contest for our people.**

His duty, comrade Bernstein closes by writing, calls him to where his strength is needed the most.

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CHAPTER 30

The Bankruptcy of Bolshevism

Vorwärts, 10 May 1920

> A new edition of Bernstein's *Preconditions of Socialism* will shortly be appearing with the publisher J.H.W. Dietz, Stuttgart—the work that provoked those well-known discussions in the party at the time. The author has added an Afterword to it, which concerns itself with the problem of Bolshevism. We reproduce some of its essential points here.

In practice, the Bolshevist enterprise is—or was hitherto—an attempt to leapfrog a significant phase of necessary social development by means of a *series of acts of will*. Russia, which is still overwhelmingly agrarian and—so far as it is industrialised—only has a working class that is in general barely skilled, should be transformed immediately into a socialist commonwealth by means of a dictatorship. This dictatorship, alluding to one of Marx's terms, is called a dictatorship of the proletariat, but is in fact the *dictatorship of a party*, which, with the support of parts of the proletariat, has placed itself in possession of the means of government at an opportune moment, and violently suppresses all other parties, socialist or otherwise, by the use of hired guards and implementing terrorist measures. In this, it benefited greatly from the governments of the Western powers declaring war on it and supporting the counter-movements led by politicking generals with gold and munitions. It is an old experience that in revolutions hardly anything gives the ruling party more power over people's minds

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than a war forced upon it from outside or by counter-revolutionaries within. With respect to this, Marx wrote in his essays about the class struggles in the French Revolution on 1848:

> The republic, therefore, had no *national* enemy to face. Consequently, there were no great foreign complications which could fire the energies, hasten the revolutionary process, drive the Provisional Government forward or throw it overboard. … The republic encountered no resistance either abroad or at home. *This disarmed it.*[1]

Encountering such resistance helped the Bolshevists to unfold a strength that exceeded their actual support in the country relative to the rest of the population many times over. It completely crippled other socialist parties' resistance to their domestic policy measures, since they did not want to invite the odium of acting as helpers to foreign enemies and counter-revolution, even only indirectly. It gave their repressive measures, which often surpassed even the despotic violence of tsarism in their cruelty—such as, for example, the taking and shooting of hostages—the title or appearance of justified emergency defence measures [*Notwehr*]. It enabled them to bring into play both class hatred and national prejudices as driving forces, and it provided them with the most convenient excuse—the one that could capture people's minds the easiest—for the fact that *the economic disintegration of Russia, hunger, and misery have tremendously increased* under their rule. Now it is certainly not easy to distinguish how much of this disintegration should be blamed on the continued state of war, and how much on the costs of the Bolshevists' particular social and economic policy, and it would only be fair of us to acknowledge that, in any event, a great share of it must be attributed to the former cause. However, in doing so, we must not forget that the continued state of war itself is, in turn, also to a high degree the consequence of the Bolshevists' policies, and even if it was not deliberate, it was still brought about with objective necessity. They *dissolved the elected national assembly, in which they were in the minority, with armed force* in 1917, and placed Russia under the dictatorship of a single party, and by doing so they themselves provoked the civil war, and gave foreign states the reason or excuse to deny their government recognition. Likewise, the state of war prolonged their practice of giving financial support to agitations in countries with which they were officially at peace, or with whom they were in the process

of concluding it, with the aim of subverting their constitution and their economy. […]

In great political revolutions, one can consistently distinguish two phases: the phase of overwhelming removal of what has become obsolete, and the phase of the *organic construction* of what is new and has become necessary. In the first phase, things rarely go without any activity that has terroristic effects, though this does not therefore have to be brutally violent. Likewise, it does not need to last a long time. On the contrary, it is in the interest of the revolution itself that this phase is completed as quickly as possible. The longer the civil war associated with it drags on, the more—as all earlier revolutions have shown and as we now see again—will *the creative work of the second phase* be impaired, and a great part of it made impossible. But since the latter is the goal, and the terrorism of the first phase only the means, socialists' efforts must be directed towards bringing about conditions that guarantee this relationship. In advanced bourgeois society, this is achieved by the *social-democratic workers' movement*. In politics and in the economy, as a party and as a movement of trade unions and cooperatives, it is the school of the organic, creative revolution. It develops the sense for what is the most advantageous thing to do in every case, and at the same time the capacity to carry it out. It hones the ability to distinguish between what is actually antiquated and what is still capable of life and development, so it protects from ruinous experiments, whose damages always fall on workers, and it guarantees success for constructive work that is recognised as necessary and feasible. Certainly, here too not all that glitters is gold; we do not yet live in an age of perfection. But precisely in the days of the German Revolution of 1918 it was shown how great an advantage it was that Germany had *such a strong workers' movement, educated through the work of trade unions, party, and cooperatives.* In the shortest time, the route of the first phase was put behind them, and the work of construction could begin. If the circumstances in which the Revolution was brought about—the disintegration of German economic life and the convulsion of social ethics by the world war—had not been so exceedingly unconducive for social work, then it would have been shown even more brilliantly how a revolution can happen bloodlessly and accomplish great reforming work when it has workers, a million organised politically and three million in trade unions, as its support and driving force. But the terrible burden that the Kaiser's rule bequeathed it in the form of debts and obligations of the most onerous kind allowed it no room to breathe freely, and it was heavily impeded in its work by the Bolshevists'

managing to win over parts of the less politically-educated German working class—among them especially the easily aroused youthful element—for their purportedly more radical doctrine of the dictatorship of councils, and for unleashing revolutionary strikes that repeatedly inflicted heavy damage on German economic life and brought in their wake interventions by the armed forces that embittered people's minds. It is generally-known and may hence also be remarked on here that the Bolshevists used extensive financial resources from official funds for foreign propaganda. For this, as for other things, they can call on the example of their tsarist predecessors in their rule over Russia. But they cannot claim that their method of *maintaining paid agents in other countries* for the purpose of fostering opposition movements against their democratic development and introducing strife into their socialist parties has any precedent in the socialist movement. But that in this respect—just as in many others besides, incidentally—they revert nonchalantly to the *ugliest methods of the old system* is in keeping with their entire political way of thinking. Their socialist theory is Marxism so far as it does not date back to before Marx, their political doctrine an overestimation of the creative power of brutal violence, and their political ethics not critique but rather a misrecognition of the liberal ideas that found their classic expression in the great French Revolution of the eighteenth century. But just as they already find themselves forced by the unbending language of facts to subject their economic policy to drastic revisions, *so too the time will not fail to come where, faced with the revolt of peoples' ineradicable aspirations for freedom and right, they will have to thoroughly revise their politics and ethics as well.*

Note

1. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, vol. 10: Marx and Engels 1849–51* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), p. 58–9.

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CHAPTER 31

The Communists

Vorwärts, 19 May 1920

The Social-Democratic Party is campaigning in this election under the slogan: the enemy lies on the *right*! But at the same time, in this campaign it has to fend off attacks against it and against the democratic Republic it is defending that are being levelled from the *left*. If so tremendously much were not at stake in this election campaign for the further development of the Republic and the welfare of the German people, then the likes of us would love nothing more than to ignore these attacks. As it is, for good or ill, we must engage with the enemies on the left.

It is a fairly simple matter with the Communists. They have a similar attitude towards the democratic Republic as the German-Nationals do from the right. They make no secret of the fact that, if possible, they want to *kill it off* at the first opportunity, in order to establish a *dictatorship of councils* in its place.

The fact that this dictatorship would lead to far more devastating economic damage in industrialised Germany than in overwhelmingly agrarian Russia bothers them just as little as the fact that in Germany—which has a middle class that is superior to the Russian one in numbers and other respects, and a peasantry that is of such a different nature than the Russian one—such a dictatorship would meet with much stronger and tougher resistance than it has there.

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Going by their own statements, they do not want to enter the Reichstag to contribute to expanding the Republic and the task of socialist reform in a positive, creative way, but rather simply to protest and, if possible, to "explode" it from inside out.

How they can believe that they will benefit the working people in any way whatsoever by doing that is a mystery. Blinded by the Bolshevist slogans, which sound Marxist but which arise from views that *Marx himself has rebutted*, they disdain the sure path of organic emancipatory work because it seems too slow to them, and resort to propagating a politics of violence [*Gewaltpolitik*] that would necessarily lead to general impoverishment and enslavement.

How much the communists' agitation endangers the welfare of the German working class has been shown before by the attempts to lower Germany's *coal production*, if not cripple it in the longer term, which were undertaken in their name. No branch of production is as important for the German economy's recovery—on which German workers' well-being reactively depends—as coal production. Whenever it stalls, almost all other important branches of production soon follow suit. On the advice of people who know this perfectly well, and under the delusion that things have to get worse for them to achieve their goal as quickly as possible, the communists have resorted to the quite specific tack of bringing the workers in the coal mines under their influence, and stirring them to actions along these lines.

If they had succeeded in this to the extent they aimed for, matters would look much, much gloomier still for our German people than they do anyway. Fortunately, the German mineworkers' *decades-long schooling* in *trade unions* did not let things get that far. But the aim was there, and even now they still have not given it up.

A second thing should be mentioned as well. Everyone knows how important the *purchasing power of German money* on the world market, its foreign exchange value, is for our German economic life. If this exchange value falls, then the ability to buy raw materials and foodstuffs at the previous price on the world market falls with it to the same degree, and all the bad effects of a rise in living and economic costs kick in. Now it is a fact that no one can dispute—because statistical proofs for it are available—that hardly any other event has as strong an effect on the fluctuation of the German foreign exchange value as anything that makes the existence of the German Republic seem either consolidated or endangered. If things happen here that shake *trust in the existence of the German Republic*, then

our foreign exchange value falls, whatever the relationship between Germany's imports and exports at that exact moment, and it only rises again once this trust has risen again too. The strong fall of the German exchange value at the time of the Kapp *putsch* and its rise after it was defeated have demonstrated this in the clearest possible way. Now the communists do not offer the slightest guarantee that the uprising they aim for will lead to the goals they have in mind in the foreseeable future. Only its immediate effect is certain. And this would necessarily be, besides all other heavy shocks to the German economy, a collapse in Germany's foreign exchange value, which would cancel out all the improvements that the Republic has achieved in recent months in this regard. And the longer the shock lasts, the lower it will fall.

Today, where the German exchange value, the purchasing power of German money on the world market, is nearly twice as high as half a year ago, we finally see—despite the shortage of goods—a drop in the prices of various important goods on the internal market. The German working class has a vital interest in ensuring that this movement does not falter. Just as the extra-parliamentary activity of the communists has the opposite effect, the same would also be the inevitable consequence of how they plan to behave in parliament, if they enter it with an appreciable number of representatives.

The social *will* of the communists is as creditable as ever. But the inevitable *effect* of their policy—which is what it comes down to after all—can only be such that we are compelled to say:

Every vote cast for the candidates of the communists instead of for social democrats of the old tendency *is lost and wasted for the Republic's progressive organic development, for the recovery of German economic life, and for the realisation of socialist reforms that accomplish their purposes*!

CHAPTER 32

The Election Campaign

Vorwärts, 31 May 1920

Communists, Vote German-Nationalist!

In a very well-attended meeting in the *Köpenick Stadttheater*, comrade *Eduard Bernstein* gave a lecture about the upcoming Reichstag elections. His excellent remarks soon made the interjections of the USPD and KPD fall silent. In the *discussion*, two supporters of each of the USPD and KPD spoke up, among others. With these twittering fools [*Wald- und Wiesenpfeifern*], it seemed as if the role played by the slogan "Noske" had now been exchanged for "formal democracy". But on account of its *novelty*, they have not yet mastered this material. Hence, a Herr *Kette*, member of the action committee of the Köpenick USPD, declared that the *general franchise* gave even young people and *maidservants* influence over shaping the Republic. *That is not good*, since *all power belongs to the workers' councils*, and they would have to gain it through the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. But the chairman of the KPD's Council of the Unemployed [*Erwerbslosenrat*], Gaschka, took the biscuit by repeatedly challenging the meeting *not to vote USPD, not SPD, but German-nationalist*! The arguments of these two speakers created a mood that our brothers on the left could not have dreamed of. In place of comrade *Bernstein*, who preoccupied himself with other demands, it was an easy matter for comrade *Weinschild* to show the speeches of Herr *Kette* and Herr *Gaschka* for what

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they are. They are the effluence either of thoughtless baiting or of subjects paid for by reactionary forces. We are proud to have won the *right of co-determination* for *maidservants* too, and hopefully they may use it in a way that aligns with a not insubstantial part of the proletariat. If, with their help, we succeed in winning *a socialist majority* in the Reichstag, then we will have the *well-founded dictatorship of the majority*. If we do not succeed this time, then we will keep working with our old tried-and-tested courage to fight, to enlighten, and to educate. This time, on 6 June, the people must decide: *either monarchy or republic*, *either reaction or democracy*, *either capitalist exploitation of the people or socialism*. Whoever wants to have the true rights of the proletariat, of women and girls, of officials, employees, and workers realised, should vote on 6 June for the list

Eduard Bernstein.

Check for updates

CHAPTER 33

The Decision

Vorwärts, 6 June 1920

How many of those who have to cast their vote in this election are aware of how much weight the decision they are making with it carries? Everyone should seriously consider this question one more time before they go to vote.

Only too many seem not yet to have realised that this weight is significantly more onerous—and the *responsibility* vested in the voter proportionately much greater—in the Republic than under the *Kaiserreich*.

I have already acutely emphasised this difference in connection to other matters, but I believe I myself should revisit it one more time for the day of the vote. Too often, I have had occasion to observe that even people who already possess a *higher* political education are subject to the force of habit on this point, and have not spoken about the decision they have to come to any differently than was the case in the days of the Kaiser.

Under the *Kaiser's regime*, the decision about the government was not down to the voter. The government was appointed by the Kaiser at the recommendation of the Chancellor, who himself in turn owed his office to the Kaiser. Vis-à-vis the electorate, the government as a political institution [*Instanz*], however often it changed its personnel, acted as "th' eternal pole, all apparitions defied", something strictly different from a popular assembly [*Volksvertretung*].[1] In the delegate or in his party, the voter was choosing his representation towards the government. That certainly has its own significance, especially for the voter from the propertyless class.

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But this significance was still limited in one respect. If the voter was fundamentally oppositionally-minded, then not all that much rested on the *tone* in which he expressed his opposition. There, the fiercest naysayer could be the most suitable representative, since there was not the slightest doubt about the direction of the 'nay': it was aimed above all at the government.

It is quite different in the democratic Republic. Here it is the voters on whom the character and composition of the government depend. The government is formed immediately by the parliament [*Volksvertretung*], specifically according to the majority that comes about within it. It has to step down if it does not retain its confidence any more. It is *the commissary agent of the parliament*, which itself in turn is the agent of the electorate. In this way, the electorate votes, through the parties, for the *government* itself, and not just its representatives to or against the government. Because of this, the vote has a very different, disproportionately higher weight. In it lies a political power that is far more strongly pronounced. But precisely for this reason, casting one's vote is associated with much higher *political responsibility*.

The electorate chooses the *government*—has the reader already fully envisioned what that means, and what sort of *obligation* that imposes on everyone who has a vote? If I want to put it quite drastically, I can do so by saying to democratic and socialist voters who have not yet freed themselves from the way of taking a position to which they were accustomed since the *Kaiserreich*:

You do not have to elect naysayers any more, but yeasayers!

Indeed, what is an election primarily about? Can it be about demonstrating and opposing [*opponieren*]? Opposing? That makes sense against a government that already exists, but not against a government that is still to be formed. Demonstrating? Oh yes, but not in a negative but rather a *positive* sense, demonstrating for what *ought to be*! Every other demonstration has no value in this election—on the contrary, it is worse than worthless.

But what is it that ought to be? Being sensible, only something that *can* be as well. It is the achievement of our great thinker Kant to have established the indivisible relation between 'ought' and 'can'. What *cannot* be, wherefore the preconditions are lacking, for that too there is no 'ought'. The voter must decide which government there ought to be, which means,

translated into the act of voting, he has to choose the party that comes closest to his convictions and is thereby willing and able [*gewillt und imstande*] to give the Republic a government.

The *socialist and democrat* who does not take this into account is committing a *crime* against the Republic. It needs a government that is determined to pursue a vigorous policy in the vein of modern democracy, encompassing the tendencies of the working class. Such a government is unthinkable without social democrats. *Whoever thinks social-democratically therefore has to vote social-democratically*, and it will certainly be gratifying if the election results in a social-democratic majority that agrees on a governing programme along these lines. But we have to reckon with the possibility that such a majority does not come about, and a majority can only be formed out of social democrats and progressive bourgeois elements, as was the case in the National Assembly, and there is much to suggest that this is even the likeliest outcome. It is therefore a dictate of political duty [*politisches Pflichtgebot*] to take this likelihood properly into consideration when deciding how to cast one's vote.

The social-democratic voter hence has to ask himself the question of whether he can reconcile it with his political conscience to lend his vote to a social-democratic party that swears under no circumstances to enter into a coalition government with left-oriented bourgeois parties. He must keep in mind that, for Germany, this refusal can lead to the political centre of gravity shifting to the right—indeed, even a situation of *dire internal fragmentation*, under which the working class would not least have to suffer heavily. In politics, it is not enough to express one's views. It is necessary to take into account the play of forces [*Spiel der Kräfte*] and to introduce one's own strength into this play as appropriate [*zweckmäßig*].

Let us assume that the relative strength of the bourgeois parties towards one another shifts under the influence of the fracturing of the Centre and other circumstances in such a way that both parties on the right together receive more votes than the two parties of the bourgeois left, and in Social Democracy the impossibilist wing—i.e., the faction of the Independents—takes a greater number of constituencies off the Majority party. Then it can come down to a handful of delegates to make the formation of an effective, decisive republican government impossible. Nobody will say that such a constellation is unthinkable, nobody capable of political judgment will delude themselves that this would not conjure up a baleful parliamentary game of swings and haggling. But we must remind ourselves of the possible consequences of our actions to correctly gauge their expediency.

Hence, anybody who wishes to see Germany kept on the path to decisive republican politics cannot let who gets his vote be determined by side issues, as countless people were in the habit of doing hitherto. For some, election day was only an opportunity to give quite drastic satisfaction to their displeasure about some event or some shortcoming; others allowed themselves to be influenced by provocations about certain personalities when they cast their vote; yet others believed that the act of voting was their opportunity to give an individual confession of faith in some abstract or fantastical doctrine, and more along similar lines. But all of that is wrong, and rests on a severe misunderstanding of the significance of the act of voting in the Republic. With it, it is not about questions of personality, nor individual policy questions, nor about declarations of ideology, but rather *decisions about quite specific, comprehensive kinds of politics.* Every policy defended by a party that has entered the campaign must be grasped *in its entirety*, starting from its guiding outlook, and with regard to *all its consequences.* The voter must be conscious of this and act in a way that recognises that he holds the fate of his people in his hand—that a *responsibility* rests on him that he did not have before.

Nowhere is this warning perhaps as fitting as among the *population of the capital*, which is influenced by a press that lives almost exclusively off critique, so that about all criticism it loses any moderation in its judgment. The consequence is a strong blasé attitude, an urge to deny for denial's sake, and a low estimation of all creative work that does not immediately bring about perfection. In dozens of cases, this blasé attitude may be correct in ascertaining the existence of imperfections, but in the last analysis it is unfruitful. *Everything great in the world is only brought about by work to which creative enthusiasm lends motivation and endurance.*

Note

1. Friedrich Schiller, 'The Walk', in Nathan Haskell Dole (ed.), *Poetical Works of Friedrich Schiller*, E. P. Arnold-Forster (tr.) (Boston, MA: Francis A. Niccolls & CO., 1901), p. 258.

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CHAPTER 34

20 February and the Republic

Vorwärts, 18 February 1921

The vitally important questions that shall be decided in Prussia's election on 20 February and its further effects for all of Germany converge in the one great question of *consolidating the Republic*. No class in society has a greater interest in this question than the class of workers, in the workshop and the office, in the pit and in the field, in transportation and in the sites of intellectual education. How the various parties are disposed towards the Republic—that is the criterion by which workers and all who belong to the workers' party have to determine their stance towards them.

In the German *Länder*, which together form the German federal republic known as the Reich, just like in the Republic itself, we do not yet have a socialist republic, but rather only as yet a *democratic republic*. But we also cannot have more than that as yet either. It is madness to imagine that the profound upheaval which transforming a *bourgeois economy* that took centuries to emerge and the legal institutions organically connected to it into a socialist society would entail, could be the work of a few years. Such a great overturning can only be the outcome of a whole series of gradually-completed organic reforms. All attempts to realise it through wilful acts of force overnight must necessarily fail, and would end in reaction instead of progress. But organic development towards socialism is *not guaranteed in any state order more securely* than in the democratic republic. It is no exag-

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geration, but rather only the summary of the insights of scientific socialism, founded in *experience*, to say that in modern developed countries, the democratic republic carries in itself an inextinguishable drive towards socialist society, which asserts itself with the necessity of elemental forces.

The innermost interest of the working class, its present and its future, demand the Republic's preservation and its organic-progressive further development. And so the parties that are competing for the people's votes on 20 February must also be examined quite specifically on the question of how they stand towards the Republic. From the perspective of current policy, this is, so to speak, the ultimate question [*Restfrage*] of the election campaign.

Now, how do things stand with the parties here? The *German-National* party is an unmistakeable enemy of the Republic, prepared at any moment to stab it in the back as soon as circumstances allow. The party of the National Liberals, which calls itself the *German People's Party*, is not its open enemy, but also not its trustworthy supporter. It has accepted the Republic because it is now here, and because restoring the monarchy is a hopeless prospect for the time being. But as the actual party of major industry, the larger banks, and privileged academia, deep down this so-called people's party is just as anti-republican at heart, and hence capable at any time of betraying the Republic. Any success for these two parties would mean weakening the Republic.

Things are somewhat different with the *Centre* and the *German-Democrats*. They have not accepted the Republic merely because it is here. They also stand by it because they know that the restoration of the monarchy in Germany is not possible without simultaneous general political reaction, and that any attempt at restoration would come up against the passionate resistance of the working class. It would call forth struggles bitterer than any Germany has ever known, and would cast over Germany a state of anarchy in the worst sense of this word. But with all that, the relationship of these parties towards the Republic is still only substantially superficial. It is for them at most a matter of reason [*Vernunftssache*], but it is not to them a matter of the heart [*Herzenssache*]. And for that reason it cannot be expected that they will fight for it in times of serious danger, or dedicate all their strength to it. On the contrary, with a great part of the members of these two centrist parties, we must beware that at such times of crisis they will not also betray the Republic, if not by calculation then still through weakness.

Today only the socialist parties are republican out of complete conviction, in their entire being, and in accordance with the nature of their policy and goals. But in this, they vary in their practical activity, and hence also in their various effects on the Republic's development and inner stability.

The *Communists* are opponents of the democratic republic as it exists today, and as is also only possible today. They do not want to reach a higher societal form by organically developing this Republic, but through its violent overthrow and a new system of class rule, which they call the dictatorship of the proletariat. For the sake of this dictatorship and its alleged magical power, they adopt a fundamentally hostile stance towards the actual Republic. In the Reich, they deny it the means to exist, they cause difficulties for it wherever possible, and they speculate on the *worsening of conditions*, because they hope this will bring about a situation from which the dictatorship they aspire to would emerge. To be sure, recently communists in some small and mid-sized states, like Saxony, Thuringia, etc., have taken a more favourable stance towards the democratic Republic. But those are only exceptions so far, swallows that do not yet make a summer, even if they herald the disintegration of the communist swarm. For the political work that the Republic needs for its healthy development, there is no relying on the communists.

But today things are not going very differently with the *Independents* either. After they had accepted nine-tenths of the doctrine of the Moscow Bolshevists, they recoiled in horror when faced with its final tenth, but they have not yet found their way back to the old social-democratic politics. Without taking a straightforwardly hostile position towards the Republic, they nevertheless show no ready willingness to sacrifice the comforts of their oppositional stance for the *needs of the Republic*. But anyone who is not prepared to make this sacrifice is only halfway there as far as the Republic is concerned. In a different sense than with the Democrats and the Centre, albeit still substantially in the same way, there is no relying fully on the Independents and Communists to preserve the Republic either. If it comes to it, *in extremis*, then—as their behaviour during the Kapp *putsch* showed—they will probably resist with far greater energy than the Republic's enemies. But doing everything necessary to ensure that matters do not even come to such extremes at all—that they will not resolve to do. With that, they put the fate of the Republic at the mercy of the vagaries of clashes whose only certainty is that they inhibit

and delay progress, but which can easily also cause far more grievous damage to social development.

By contrast, the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, the old SPD, is in every respect the supporter, even the *buttress of the Republic*. Its politics is geared towards fostering and safeguarding the Republic in *all* circumstances, determined to carry out the task of *organic work* in legislation and administration as well as *defence* in moments of crisis. It is, we may say without exaggeration, *the* party of the German Republic—and this quality is recognised today by all insightful politicians abroad as well. However, whatever concessions other countries are prepared to make to Germany, they will only make to a Germany that has been firmly established as a Republic. Nobody who follows the foreign press attentively will doubt that, nor anybody who has the opportunity to speak with knowledgable politicians abroad. Nothing worse could happen to the Germans as a nation than for the party that calls itself German-National to win this election. For only political neophytes could be convinced that other countries would let themselves be intimidated by its big talk. Rather, they would only conclude from its victory that the German people are a lost cause, and would have to be treated accordingly.

The outcome of the election in Prussia, which holds more than three-fifths of Germany's population (37 of 60 million souls), is viewed everywhere as a gauge of the political party relationships in Germany. Therefore, from the perspective of domestic as well as foreign policy, it is of the greatest importance for our people—and paramount for the German working class—that 20 February in Prussia is a day of victory for the Republic. Let everyone do what he must in this final hour to turn it into one. But the worker and socialist who has recognised the needs and tasks of our time can do nothing better than to canvass until the last moment for the party to which the welfare and woe of the German Republic is the most intimately tied: the Social-Democratic Party of Germany!

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CHAPTER 35

Four Years On

7 November 1917 and 9 November 1918

Breslauer Volkswacht, 9 November 1922

> *Preliminary remark*: I was asked by the Berlin representative of *Izvestia*, the organ of the Bolshevist Soviet government in Russia, whether I would be prepared to supply him with a comparison between the revolution of 25 October / 7 November 1917 and the one that took place in Germany on 9 November 1918, for the anniversary edition of that paper dedicated to commemorating the former uprising. I sent the following short article for him to submit to *Izvestia*. He said he would do so, but whether *Izvestia* brought out the article does not seem entirely certain to me. —Ed. B.

The uprising in Russia of 25 October / 7 November 1917, and the uprising in Germany that reached its peak on 9 November 1918 in Berlin, were so fundamentally different in their character and in their ideology that it seems barely permissible to apply the same political expression 'revolution' to them both. In any case, one cannot do that without using adjectives to define them more precisely. 7 November 1917 is the date of a subversive act of violence that, in my opinion, has a claim to the name of revolution in just about the same sense as some or other of the violent acts that periodically changed the monopoly on rulership in Asiatic empires, for better or for worse. What took place that day with the help of politically-uneducated soldiers was a violent *coup de main* against a revolution in the midst of its development, through

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which this revolution ended up under the despotism of a party that has kept itself in power by military force ever since. That even today, after five years, this party believes it cannot grant any other political party in its gigantic empire—be it bourgeois or socialist—the room to breathe [*Luft und Licht*], is the tragedy of its attitude to rulership, since it betokens its internal weakness. Having taken charge with a claim to be the most extreme-left of the parties of socialism, today it forges compromises with capitalists abroad and sees a new capitalism taking shape in its own country, which only differs from the old one in its greater lack of civilisation. But its restriction of intellectual life through its suppression of any independent press makes it appear more closely related to old-fashioned orthodox tsarism than any party of revolutions hitherto. No matter how nobly its partisans think of an insurrection that from the beginning onwards continuously sinks a country into a state of intellectual serfdom, history will not confer on it the name of 'revolution'.

The new political state of affairs created in Germany on 9 November 1918 has not yet brought about much of what those to whose active intervention it owes its existence expected from it. The German Republic proclaimed on that day by the workers of Berlin is not yet a workers' republic [*Republik der Arbeiter*]. Yet that does not already make it a bourgeois republic [*Bourgeois-Republik*]—rather, it is a civic republic [*bürgerliche Republik*] in the old democratic conception of the word. But the change it represents compared with the Kaiser's regime that preceded it is absolutely not merely a formal one. In Germany in the November days of 1918, thrones were not just toppled and crowns decried as useless deadwood, chains fell away as well that had been inhibiting the working class in its advancement. This uprising has quite substantially improved both the political rights of Germany's working classes and their social-legal status [*soziale Rechtsstellung*] too. Despite the great economic pressure weighing on Germany as an aftereffect of the world war and—we may easily admit—also as a result of certain blunders, the German worker today is decidedly freer than he was under the *Kaiserreich*, and this greater freedom translates for ever wider social strata into greater power to resist economically depressing tendencies. And by enhancing the freedom of the working class in Germany irrespective of party, the uprising of November 1918 has increased freedom there in general and thereby satisfied one of the most important requirements that lend an uprising the character of a modern revolution. In our

age, we can only speak of revolution where freedom gains wider scope. But that is the case in the new Germany that was created in November 1918. 9 November in Germany is not a day of celebration just for one party and its members, it is the day of the working people at large in common. And therein lies the proof that it is a day that commemorates a true revolution.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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